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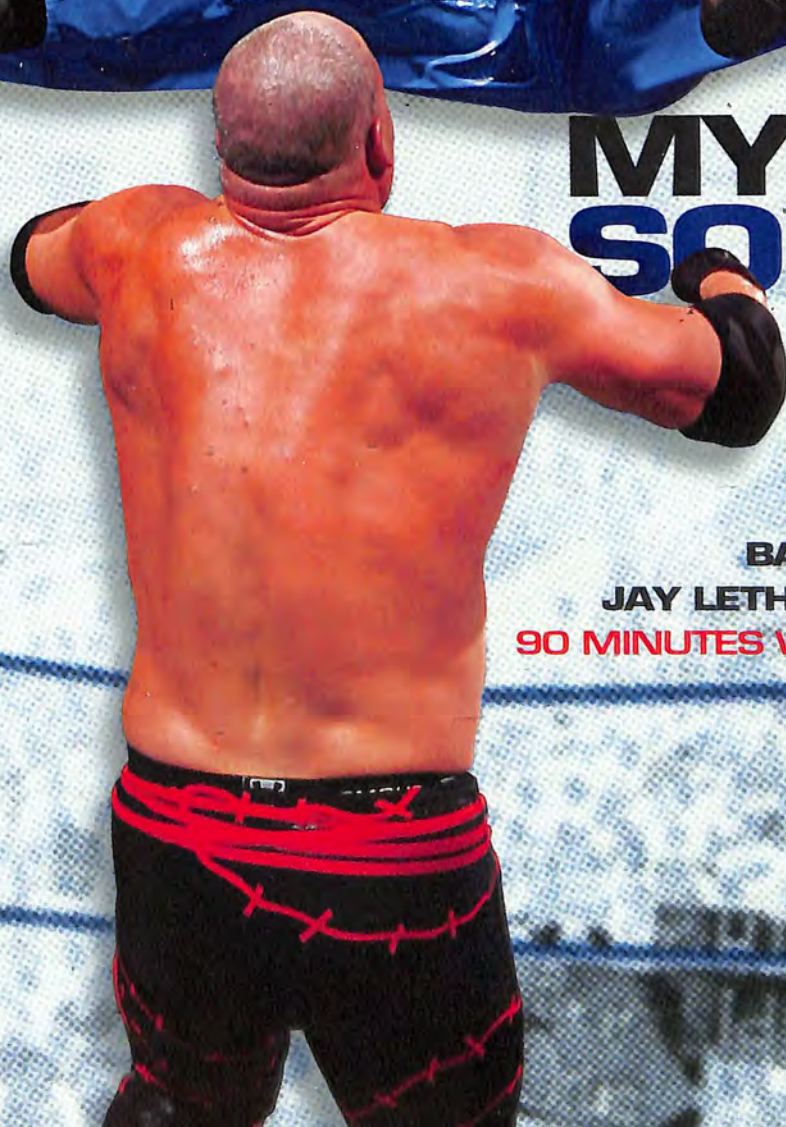


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Rey Mysterio Jr.?



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90 MINUTES WITH DORY FUNK JR.



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GREG STEVENS

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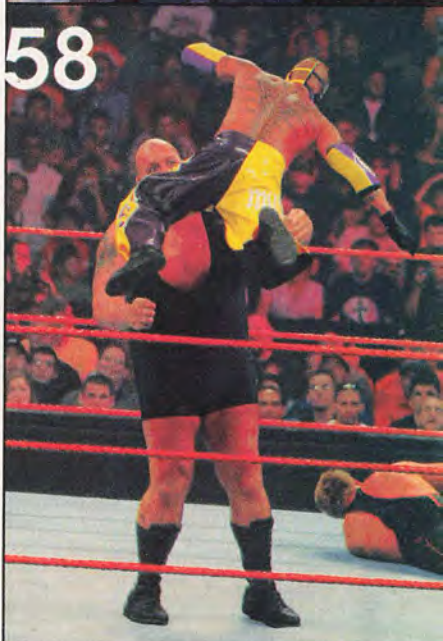
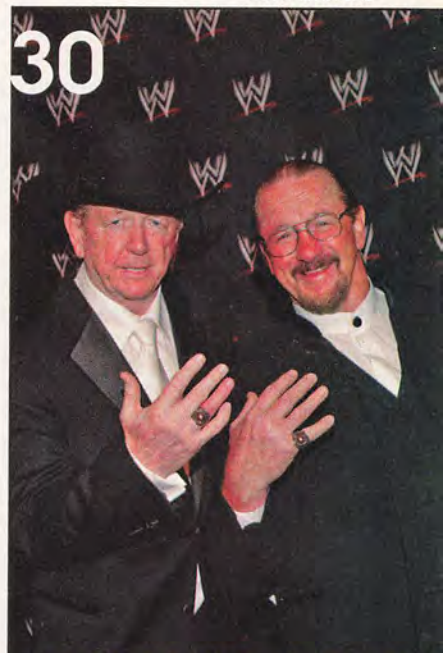
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YOUR LETTERS

PURE STRATUSFACTION

I was reading *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling* Volume 34, 2010, and I must say I thoroughly enjoyed the interview with Trish Stratus. It has been such a long time since Trish did an interview. It was nice to hear her thoughts on today's female wrestlers in the WWE. It was also nice to hear her comments about her career as well.

It seems that Trish has been very busy since leaving WWE with movies, a reality show, and yoga studio. The best part is that she is possibly considering a return. How great would it be to see Trish vs. Beth Phoenix or Natalya. Trish is certainly what WWE needs to bring the women's division back to its glory days. I definitely look forward to Trish's return in the future.

JUSTIN WICK
Clintonville, PA

Harry Burkett is wrestling's answer to Harry Reasoner!

I'm loving his series of interviews with wrestling's legends in *THE WRESTLER* each issue. By the time Harry gets these wrestlers talking, they seem like they're engaged in a conversation with an old friend. When Trish invited him to her studio to do yoga, I almost fell out of my seat laughing.

Keep up the great work, Harry, and don't let Trish hurt you!

LARRY TILLERY
Brockton, MA

A STEINERS REUNION?

Now that Scott Steiner has been wrestling in Puerto Rico, I would like to see him reunite with his brother, Rick, and challenge for the WWC tag title. I think it could help both of their careers as well as their tag team legacy.

JOSE JIMENEZ
New York, NY

INGRATES!

As a fan, I find it very difficult to sympathize with the Season One *NXT* wrestlers. I don't see what it is they want from WWE or the folks on *Raw*. They were given an opportunity that 99 percent of all young wrestlers would kill for. And they all knew there could only be one winner.

It's too bad they can't accept the rules, but they are totally in the wrong for destroying the set of *Raw* and attacking everybody week after week. Instead of trying to disrupt *Raw*, maybe these men should get back in the gym and train harder.

WINNIE HECKHERT
Winston-Salem, NC

NO STOPPING "SUPER MEX"

I want to give props to "Super Mex" Hernandez for coming back to TNA in razor sharp condition after spending three months in AAA. And now that he no longer has Homicide holding him back, he can take care of Matt Morgan and move up the rankings.

Top to bottom, I feel there is nobody on the TNA roster that can stop Hernandez.

PHILLIP ESTES
Sierra Vista, AZ

HBK, COME BACK!

Okay, Shawn Michaels has had a few months to get this retirement thing out of his system. It's time for a comeback.

It's commendable that he'd want to spend time with his wife and kids. He's certainly earned the right to pick and choose when, where, and how often he'd wrestle. But wrestle he must. He has way too much left to quit.

I don't want to sound like a selfish fan, but the sport needs HBK, particularly, according to your writer Louie Dee, his D-X



Photo by Paul Wright

There was quite a bit of reader reaction to our Q&A interview with Trish Stratus in Volume 34, 2010. Trish spoke out on many topics, including the state of women's wrestling and the possibility that she will make a comeback.

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tag team partner ("Triple-H Without Shawn Michaels ... The Game's About To Change," Volume 34).

Look, if Shawn doesn't want to wrestle anymore, that's understandable. It's a dangerous business and he's done just about all that anyone could ever do. But if he's even thinking about coming back, he should just do it. He can wrestle at a top level for three more years and then have the rest of his life for retirement.

HAL BRIMSTONE
Willmington, DE

"COUNTER" ON-POINT

I always like reading "Point/Counterpoint" in *THE WRESTLER*. It often reminds me of a good courtroom drama, where the summations of both lawyers are so convincing that in spite of what I thought I believed, I don't know what to think by the time the jury heads off to deliberate.

I thought that it was a good thing that TNA was playing up adult storylines because that's something WWE can no longer do with a PG rating. Then I read the "Counterpoint" by Dave Lenker (Volume 34) and it made a lot of sense to me. TNA could benefit in the short term by playing to an older demographic than WWE, but the long-term effects could be very damaging to the brand.

So I think I agree with Dave. Then again, had I read Al Alven's "Point" first, I might have agreed with him. Heck, I don't know what to think!

Great job, guys!

CINDY RAMPERT
Pontiac, MI □

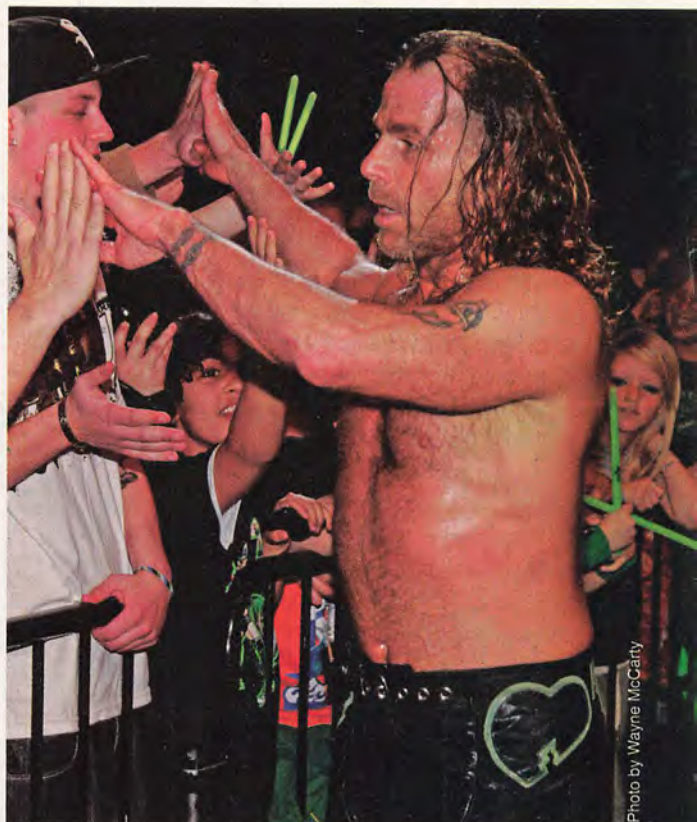


Photo by Wayne McCarty

The longer Shawn Michaels is away, the more the fans yearn for his return, particularly Hal Brimstone, who feels that if HBK has the urge to return, he should act on it.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY JEFF RUOSS

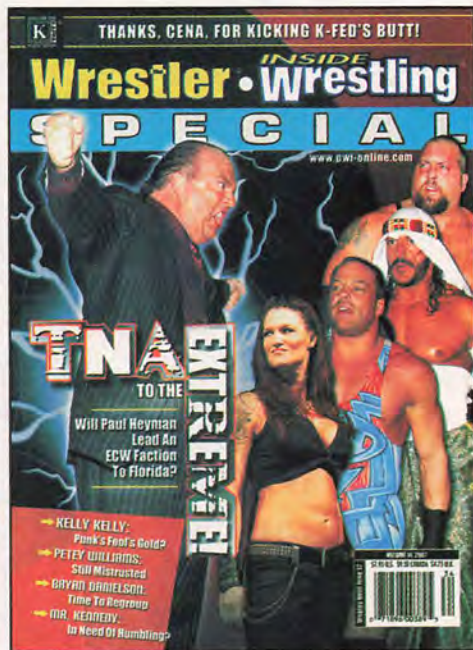
WILL **DIXIE CARTER** hire **Paul Heyman**? That's the scuttlebutt as we go to press for this issue, and, quite frankly, we don't know the answer to that question. Yet there are a number of indisputable facts regarding TNA's current situation. First, **Hulk Hogan** and **Eric Bischoff** have not been the silver bullets to help TNA challenge WWE. Second, *Impact's* Monday night experiment was an utter failure, and even the Thursday night ratings haven't recovered from the move. Third, Hogan, Bischoff, and even **Vince Russo** are showing signs of disengaging from TNA.

And, fourth, Paul Heyman is the only option that Ms. Carter has not tried.

Why is this rumor coming to the fore now? Well, there is already an ECW reunion of sorts taking place in TNA, with **Rob Van Dam** as World champion, **Team 3-D** very much in the tag team picture, **Taz** on color commentary, and **Tommy Dreamer**, **Raven**, **Stevie Richards**, and **Rhino** sitting in ring-side seats at TNA events. The only person missing is Heyman.

We've been predicting this for a long time, as far back as our Volume 14, 2007, issue ("TNA To The Extreme: Will Paul Heyman Lead An ECW Faction To TNA?"). Heyman and his legendary hardcore warriors were never a good fit for WWE's version of ECW. They were cast off fairly quickly. And TNA has always been the logical alternative.

This rumor gained new life, thanks to an interview Heyman granted to *The Wrestling Observer*. "Someone has to have one vision so the television show means something and the marketing of the brand means something," he noted. "TNA doesn't have a clue how to make a star. Even if they did know how to do good television, they don't know how to market the fact that they're doing good television. And if they were marketing what they're doing now, everybody would say, 'Oh,



Three years ago, *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling* forecast an ECW-style invasion of TNA. We even had a name for the invaders: The New World Xtreme (NWX). Paul Heyman would consider taking charge of TNA Creative—if certain conditions were met.

God, this sucks. Why are you marketing this?"

The former ECW owner said he would be willing to work with TNA if he were given complete control in all aspects of the business, the ability to hire his own staff, a five-year window of success, and a share of an eventual initial public offering on the stock market.

Heyman was serious, and now Carter is aware of the conditions.

Carter has burned through **Jeff Jarrett**, **Kurt Angle**, **Russo**, **Hogan**, and **Bischoff**, it does seem that Heyman is her last and only hope. And, with former ECW talent assembling at TNA, the storm clouds are brewing... and there will likely be a big change in the weather down in Orlando. We'll see whether Carter is smart enough—or desperate enough—to take the risk.

But just because TNA isn't producing the television ratings or pay-per-view buy rates to make Hogan's very expensive price tag worthwhile doesn't

mean that its product isn't entertaining. Indeed, the sometimes humorous, sometimes intense exchanges between **Ric Flair** and **Jay Lethal** have created some memorable moments on *Impact* (see story on page 62). Few fans will ever forget the verbal battle between the definitive "Nature Boy" and, yes, "Nature Boy" Jay Lethal. Despite Flair's dirty tricks, Lethal has expressed tremendous excitement and downright awe about working with arguably the greatest wrestler of all-time.

Regarding his now-famous dueling "Nature Boys" segment with Flair, Lethal told **Alfonso Castillo** of *Newsday*, "If the microphone is in his hand, then there's no going over what he's going to say. Everything he says, he comes up with right then and there. So then, I have no choice but to react to what he's going to say. There was no pre-planning of anything."

Another TNA star doing some talking is Kurt Angle, who made his first public comments about Jeff Jarrett and his ex-wife, **Karen Angle**, becoming an item. "At one point, I

Heyman might not be able to deliver his friend Brock Lesnar to TNA, but given the control he demands, he would certainly shake up the organization. The ball is apparently in Dixie Carter's court.

Photo by Jon Carmichael



Kurt and Karen Angle's marriage was, to say the least, a tumultuous one. Kurt recently revealed that when Karen and Jeff Jarrett became a couple, he asked TNA to release him. Fortunately, Dixie Carter refused his request.

wanted to be released," he said on the *Boomer & Carton* radio show on WFAN in New York. "I'm glad Dixie Carter refused to release me, because I'm very happy there. Everything worked out for the best."

During the same appearance, which he made with former Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne**, Angle claimed he was making too much money in TNA to give up wrestling for mixed martial arts—although he wouldn't rule out the UFC after he retires from wrestling.

Although Angle is a good friend of current UFC heavy-weight champion **Brock Lesnar**, he did not join the array of former WWE wrestlers who were in attendance for Lesnar's title-unification fight against **Shane Carwin**. **Steve Austin**, **The Rock**, and **Bill Goldberg**—in addition to Paul Heyman and **Jim Ross**—were on hand for the big fight. Lesnar almost succumbed to Carwin's punching power in the first round, but rallied against the "interim champion" in the second round and forced him to tap out with a new jiu-jitsu hold. It was an impressive performance from the former WWE champ, who overcame a serious bout with diverticulitis late last year.

Unlike The Rock in most of his media appearances, Lesnar didn't shy away from his pro wrestling background during the post-match celebration and press conference. After Lesnar let out some Ric Flair *whoos*, Austin, Rock, Goldberg, and Heyman (who is helping Lesnar write his autobiography) were the first to congratulate him. Later, Lesnar credited WWE giving him the notoriety to receive an opportunity in the UFC, and also noted that his pro wrestling experience allowed him to

"emotionally detach" from the difficult first round and come back in the second.

We have received late word that **Scott Hall** is in the hospital with double pneumonia. Apparently, Hall suffered from a persistent cough for several weeks and refused to visit a doctor. His condition took a turn for the worse, and sources close to Hall predict it will take him quite some time to recover.

Hall was arrested on May 14 for becoming aggressive and loudly cursing patrons at a bar in his hometown of Chuluota, Florida. TNA gave him a leave of absence after the incident.

Bryan Danielson is still angry after WWE granted him a permanent leave of absence on June 11. And if you don't believe us, just check out a recent blog entry on bryandanielson.tv: "As with anyone who gets fired from their job, especially when they feel it's unjust, I am angry. Very angry."

Danielson was fired because of an incident on the June 7 edition of *Raw* in which he and the other *NXT* trainees attacked then-WWE champ **John Cena**. Officials felt Danielson violated WWE's PG-rating guidelines when he choked announcer **Justin Roberts** with his tie and spat in Cena's face.

"I apologized for both immediately following the incident, but I would be a hypocrite if I apologized for putting everything I have into the attack," stated Danielson. "I would much rather have gone too far than come up too short." WWE explained Danielson's ouster by having *NXT* members kick him out of the group for expressing remorse about the incident.

Although there was a 90-day non-compete clause in Danielson's contract, WWE allowed him to work dates for other



Photo by Joe Zanolle

Bryan Danielson may still be upset with WWE for what he believes was an unjustified termination, but he's now even higher in demand on the indy circuit—and does have his name back.

companies—including Ring of Honor and Dragon Gate USA—as long as his matches aren't aired on television or pay-per-view. Danielson acknowledged that TNA was interested in his services, but he didn't rule out a return to WWE in the future. That would be bad news for **Michael Cole**.

Over the Limit, WWE's May pay-per-view headlined by John Cena vs. **Batista** in an "I Quit" match, earned 229,000 buys, putting it squarely in line with last year's Judgment Day. However, those figures are significantly down from 2008, when Judgment Day earned 252,000 buys.

Now it's time to update you on recent passings in our industry. **Aurelian "Grizzly" Smith** died on June 12 due to complications from Alzheimer's disease. He was 77. To modern fans, he is best known as the father of **Jake Roberts**, **Sam Houston**, and former WWF Women's champion **Rockin' Robin**.

Born in Whitesboro, Texas, Smith grew to an astounding 6'10" and 300-plus pounds. He worked in the oil fields for a while, but gravitated to pro wrestling in the late-1950s. He enjoyed his first success in Oklahoma in 1960 when—as Tiny Anderson—Smith teamed with **Luke Brown** to form **The Kentuckians**, complete with the plaid shirts and overalls. They expanded their travels into the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, California, Texas, and even Canada, collecting tag team titles everywhere they went. **The Assassins** were their biggest rivals.

Smith also began to rub against some big names along the way, winning the Canadian tag team title with **Don Leo Jonathan** in Vancouver, defeating **Freddie Blassie** for the WWA title in Atlanta, and beating **The Spoiler** for the Texas State title.

Into the 1970s, Smith settled into another phase of his career, and one in which he would gain special notoriety. He was **Bill Watts'** right-hand man in the Mid-South for well over a dozen years, and used that experience to become a road agent for the WWF and WCW. Smith took on cemetery maintenance in his final years and last made headlines when he injured his leg and lost all his belongings during Hurricane Katrina.

We've lost two of the famous Monroe Brothers since our last issue. **Sputnik Monroe** (Roscoe Brumbaugh), who died in 2006, was the most famous of the faux brother trio. They were obvi-



Grizzly Smith wraps his powerful arms around the midsection of one of The Assassins during a 1965 bout in Tampa. Smith, who passed away in June at age 77, teamed with Luke Brown as The Kentuckians.

ously trying to capitalize on the Space Age craze, even bleaching a streak of their hair to seem otherworldly. Interestingly, the brother most commonly associated with Sputnik, **Rocket Monroe** (whose real name was Maury High), was not his real brother. High was actually a promising high school and college football player when a knee injury forced him to consider a wrestling career. After a while, he changed his name to "Rocket" and his career took off with Sputnik. High passed away on June 7 after suffering an infection.

Jet Monroe (whose real name was Gary Brumbaugh) was Sputnik's real-life brother. He joined Sputnik and Rocket as their manager in New York during the early-1960s, had a run teaming exclusively with Sputnik in Georgia, and wrestled as a single in Alabama. He eventually dropped out of the business and took a job with Walgreen's. Jet passed away on May 12.

Finally, famed luchador **El Scorpio** (whose real name was **Rafael Nunez Contreras**) died on June 25 at age 57 in his native Mexico. His career spanned from the 1960s to the 1990s and he never lost his mask. The highlight of his career came when he beat **El Canek** for the UWA heavyweight title on April 30, 1985. His son Rafael has wrestled as **Scorpio Jr.** and various other identities. □

ON

ASSIGNMENT

IF A CASUAL fan was to judge exclusively by the dearth of publicity the company has garnered in recent years, it would be fair to assume that Ohio Valley Wrestling simply withered up and blew away once WWE severed its ties to its former developmental federation.

John Cena, Batista, Randy Orton, Beth Phoenix, and dozens more of today's top stars cut their teeth in the cozy confines of the Davis Arena. And, honestly, the only

similarity that tiny building on Shepherdsville Road had to an arena was that there was someone hawking concessions by the front door. But from 2000 to 2009, that tiny venue was home to some of the biggest names in wrestling, and fans lucky enough to live near Louisville, Kentucky, were able to get a sneak peak at the stars of tomorrow long before they ever showed up in WWE (or TNA in some cases).

In February 2009, WWE broke its ties

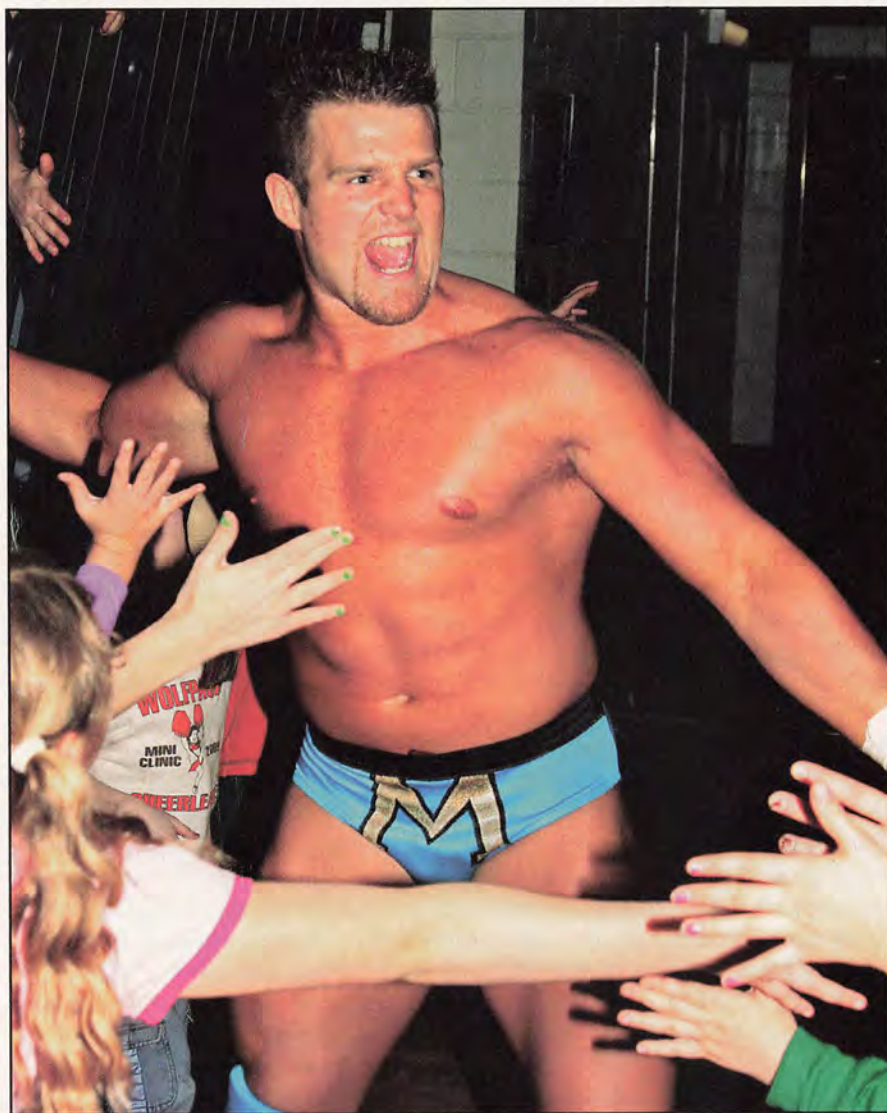
with OVW, and the wrestlers who were under WWE developmental contracts were shipped south to WWE's other developmental territory, Florida Championship Wrestling. FCW became the buzzworthy indy promotion; OVW simply slipped off the radar screen.

But just try telling the OVW faithful that the company ceased to be relevant once WWE went bye-bye. Things are heating up again in Kentuckiana.

"There was a bit of a downturn in attendance after WWE developmental left, and there were some ups and downs over the past year, but things are definitely up right now," said Jamin Olivencia, a five-time former OVW TV champion who has been with the company since 2006. "People are hooked on the product. We've got a great mix of talent here today that the fans are really getting behind."

Leading the charge of the OVW renaissance is Mike Mondo, best remembered by most fans for his stint as Mikey in The Spirit Squad. Mondo started in Ohio Valley in 2003 before moving on to WWE in 2005. Last year, he returned to Louisville, where he quickly won the TV title (which he eventually lost to Olivencia). What Mondo may lack in size, he makes up for in heart, technical prowess, and charisma. He commands attention everytime he steps in the ring, especially now that his abilities aren't being overshadowed by a ridiculous male cheerleader gimmick.

On May 29, Mondo won the OVW heavyweight title for the first time by beating Brent "Beef" Wellington. I wasn't there, but from what I've heard—both from fans and locker room sources—the match was one of the best bouts to grace an OVW ring in years. And that includes the WWE era.



Heavyweight champion Mike Mondo is greeted by OVW loyalists as he enters the ring. There is no less "spirit" in this man than there was in WWE.

BY LIZ HUNTER ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

PHOTOS BY STEVE BEYER

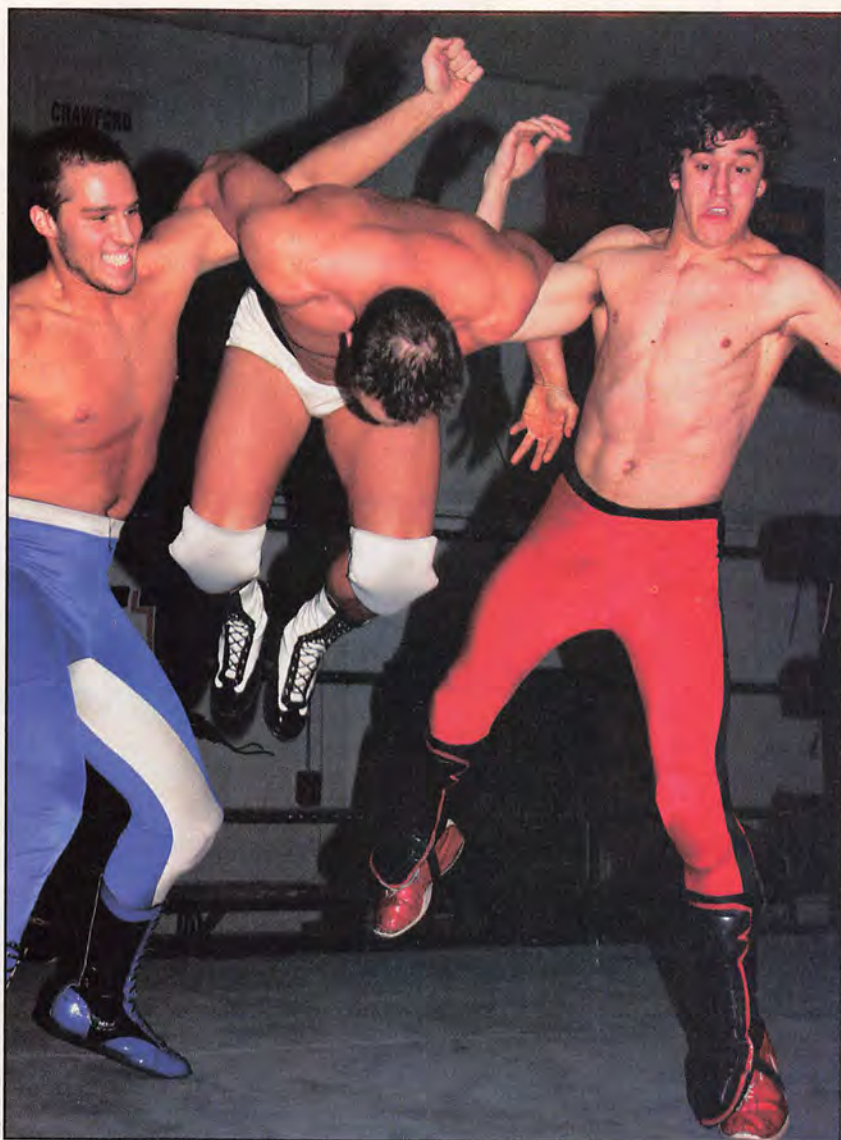
With eight years experience under his belt, Mondo is practically a grizzled old veteran compared to the rest of OVW's young lions. In addition to Olivencia (who has made a handful of WWE appearances over the past five years), other wrestlers that are getting people talking include the bigheaded Ali, the enigmatic Paredyse, and a pair of promising tag teams, Southern tag team champions The Elite (Adam Revolver and Ted McNaler) and the high-flying, quasi-luchador team of Sucio and Fang.

OVW is featuring a new breed of athletes these days, and the fans are eating it up.

"It used to be that you would come here to OVW shows to see wrestlers who were on their way to WWE," said John Rollins, a longtime fan who has been attending OVW shows for more than a decade. "But you always knew that any wrestlers who went on to WWE might adopt a new name or an entirely new character once they got there. It was awesome having WWE working with a small promotion here in Louisville—I was able to see huge stars in an intimate arena, and I was able to meet many of them face-to-face. But now the OVW wrestlers seem a little more relaxed. They don't have the office watching over them and critiquing them. They're enjoying themselves. They're developing more interesting personas and different wrestling styles. And that's making OVW wrestling even more fun than it was before."

In addition to running three or four shows each week—a schedule that puts most independent promotions, including Ring of Honor, to shame—Ohio Valley Wrestling is still providing talent to WWE, FCW, Pro Wrestling NOAH, and several other promotions.

Of course, one of Ohio Valley's calling cards has always been its training school. The perennially underrated—and perpetually entertaining—Rip Rogers is



Benjamin Bray and Andrew Lacroix execute a double-hiptoss on Jimbo Ono. The OVW tag team division, led by Southern tag champs Ted McNaler and Adam Revolver, is pretty deep.

the lead trainer. Former OVW standout Nick "Eugene" Dinsmore runs special training camps to help aspiring grapplers learn if they have the right stuff for a career in the squared circle. The successful school ensures a steady succession of athletic youngsters graduating onto the main roster, which keeps things interesting.

"We've got a lot of exciting guys coming up here," Olivencia said. "We've been seeing capacity crowds coming out, and there's been a great energy around here.

Things are really on the upswing."

With the mix of veteran know-how in the form of Rogers, Dinsmore, Mondo, and OVW owner Danny Davis and the blossoming of youngsters like Olivencia, Ali, and Paredyse, Louisville is once again becoming a wrestling hotbed.

Maybe ... just maybe ... the separation from WWE was exactly what Ohio Valley Wrestling needed. The spotlight is now shining on a new generation of homegrown stars. Judging by fan feedback, that's a very welcome development. □

ON THE FARM

BY LOUIE DEE

PHOTOS BY ROBERT BEUKEMA

IT'S SUMMERTIME ON the Gulf Coast, which means the outside temperatures are scorching hot. But inside the FCW Arena, the action has been just as blazing over the past few months. Champions and alliances have crumbled, new titles have been established, and another cast of fresh faces is in line for the opportunity of a lifetime.

A Night to Remember. Move over, Queen of FCW, because there's a new alpha female in town—and instead of a

tiara, she has a title belt to represent her kingdom.

After seven weeks of action, the eight-Diva tournament to crown the inaugural FCW Divas champion concluded with Naomi Night standing tall. After early-round victories over Liviana and Savannah, Night defeated Serena on the June 20 episode of *FCW TV* to win the tournament and the gold.

It was bittersweet revenge for Night, who was attacked by the "Straight Edge

Diva" the previous week and had a good foot-long chunk of her hair cut off. Naomi's locks will grow, and her winning streak should too.

Night was victorious in her first televised defense against reigning FCW Queen AJ Lee on the July 4 episode of *FCW TV*, and shows no signs of slowing down. Meanwhile, there is no word at press time about what will happen to that Queen of FCW title (if anything), but Naomi's win over Lee seemingly makes her the undisputed top dog in the FCW Divas division.

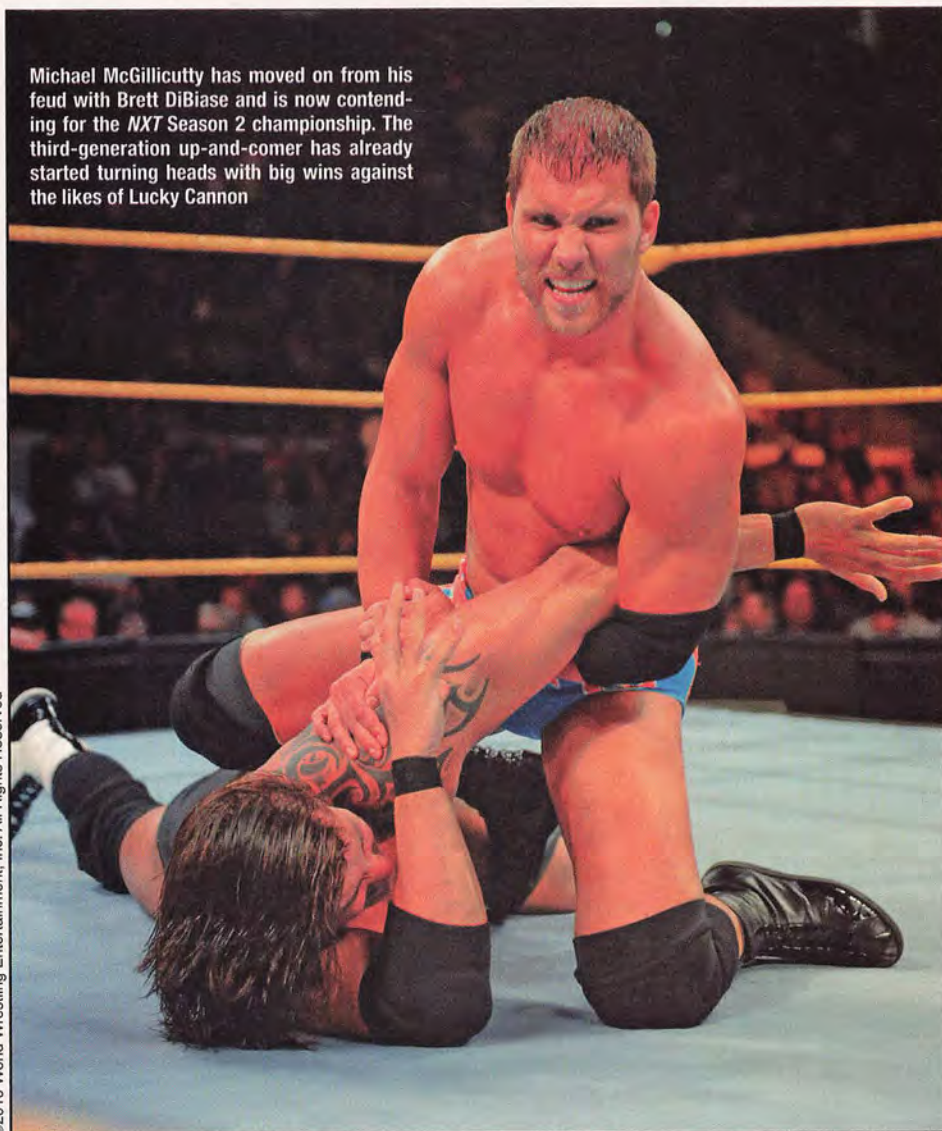
The new FCW Divas championship belt, by the way, is a beautiful piece of art. For longtime fans who may remember the old Sensational Sherri-era WWF Women's title, the new belt looks a lot like that on a pink strap. The title, designed by TNA Knockouts and SHIMMER title artist Dave Millican, is a fabulous crown jewel for the division.

¡Los Aviadores Son Campeones! For our non-Spanish-speaking readers, that means "The Flyers are champions," and it's proof that Orlando Colon didn't take long to make an impact in FCW.

After several tries, Colon—now wrestling under a mask as Dos Equis—and *Los Aviadores* partner Hunico finally ended the three-month FCW tag team championship reign of Jimmy and Jules Uso.

The two teams wrestled some barnburners in the weeks leading up to the change, but the Usos always survived intact. It was a different story this time around, however, as without their "Polynesian Power Package" (including Tamina,

Michael McGillicutty has moved on from his feud with Brett DiBiase and is now contending for the *NXT* Season 2 championship. The third-generation up-and-comer has already started turning heads with big wins against the likes of Lucky Cannon





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Just as Season 1 *NXT*ers began breaking apart WWE show by show, Season 2 kicked off with a strong lineup of hopefuls that were ready to do what they had to in order to claim *NXT* supremacy.

Donny Marlow, and Brodus Clay) to back them up, Rikishi's twin sons couldn't get the job done and surrendered the gold when Equis pinned Jules.

With the former champs and Tamina now part of the Raw roster, a new force will have to emerge to challenge *Los Aviadors*. Every other established tag team in FCW has one or both members either injured or competing on *NXT*, which means that Marlow and Clay could quickly become top contenders to the belts while trying to avenge their packmates.

The (Un)Fortunate Sons Saga Concludes. The feud between former Fortunate Sons partners Brett DiBiase and Joe Hennig is finally over, with the latter coming out as the clear winner.

The spring breakup of the former tag team champions was a bitter one that led to a series of vitriolic confrontations and matches on *FCW TV*, most of which saw Hennig come out on top.

So in true Florida wrestling tradition, FCW President Steve Keirn and GM Norman Smiley decided that the rivalry must come to a head once and for all in a

Lights Out Bunkhouse match! The affair, reminiscent of many of the brawls of old in the Fort Homer Hesterly Armory, saw Hennig triumph after smashing DiBiase in the face with his cowboy boot.

That wasn't enough for Brett, though, as he got one last shot at Hennig. The match ended in a double-disqualification after a locker room-clearing brawl erupted. Still, it was a clear loss for DiBiase, who suffered a torn ACL in the scuffle.

Brett was expected to be out for the remainder of 2010.

Who Else Is *NXT*? June 1 was a big day for FCW. Moments before Wade Barrett was announced as the winner of *NXT* Season 1, the eight rookies competing on *NXT* Season 2 were announced: McGillicutty, Alex Riley, Kaval, Percy Watson, Eli Cottonwood, Titus O'Neil, Percy Watson, Husky Harris, and Lucky Cannon.

At press time, Riley was the reigning FCW heavyweight champion—much like Justin Gabriel was when Season 1 began. Watson is the South Beach Boys partner of Season 1's Darren Young, Kaval fills Daniel Bryan's "independent superstar" role, and Cottonwood and O'Neill are

both two-sport professional athletes.

The final two are also FCW stars competing under new names. Harris is a third-generation wrestler you may know better as Duke Rotundo, while Cannon is the new in-ring moniker of Johnny Prime. While they may have new names, Harris and McGillicutty did at least have their heritages revealed as part of their initial *NXT* vignettes.

A ninth farmhand, Jamie Keyes, is also a part of the clan, replacing Savannah as the ring announcer for Syfy's Tuesday night showcase.

Just days after the new breed was unleashed, there was a series of matches between *NXT* Season 1 and Season 2 contestants at the June 3 live event. The "old guard" proved they still have a leg up by going 3-0, with Gabriel topping McGillicutty, Barrett pinning O'Neil, and the quartet of David Otunga, Skip Sheffield, Heath Slater, and Michael Tarver besting Cannon, Cottonwood, Harris, and Watson.

That was just a small inconvenience for the rookies of Season 2, who are tearing it up on Syfy every Tuesday night. □

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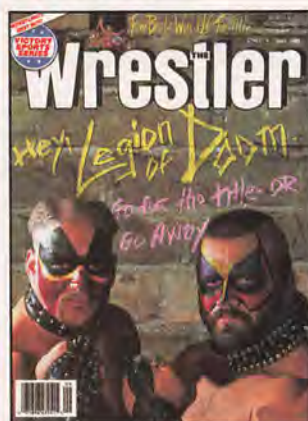
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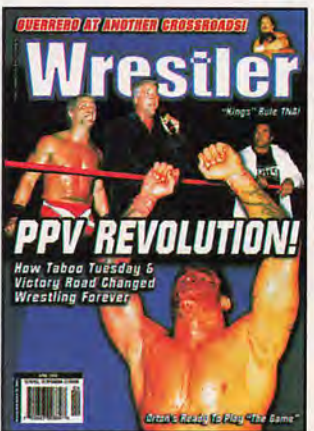
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The Wrestler

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THUMBS UP



Photo by Joe Zanolle

Thumbs Up to Bryan Danielson. As *NXT* “rookie” reject Daniel Bryan, Danielson landed himself in trouble with WWE for choking ring announcer Justin Roberts with his necktie. Even after being fired for his unaware indiscretion, Danielson has remained tight-lipped about the nature of his release, offering nothing but compliments to his former employer. One has to wonder if the man once regarded as a top wrestler in the world is already angling for a WWE return, or if his lack of commentary is more a statement about his humble nature. Either way, he is handling himself in his typical professional manner.

Thumbs Up to Kurt Angle. Some might consider Angle removing himself from TNA's Top 10 ratings last May to be a stupid decision. By announcing he would instead work his way up TNA's rankings (starting with number-10 Kazarian), Angle proved he does not want to take any shortcuts to the top.

If this decision ends with Kurt holding the TNA belt in a few months, then Angle and TNA will both be all the better for it. A little honor goes a long way in any walk of life.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Up to Jesse Neal. A trainee of Brothers Ray and Devon, Neal has remained very respectful toward his mentors despite taking heat from Ray for venturing into TNA's tag team ranks with Shannon Moore. It seems that Neal—who actually sought out Team-3-D's blessing before pursuing a tag title—greatly upset Brother Ray. Ray, in turn, assaulted Neal for the seemingly personal affront of vying for “his” championship. Kudos to Neal for remaining respectful, in spite of Brother Ray's nasty demeanor.

Thumbs Up to Sheamus. It has to be more than the luck of the Irish. While we might not always approve of Sheamus' actions in the ring, the fact remains “The Celtic Warrior” is now a two-time WWE heavyweight champion, courtesy of yet another title victory over John

Cena at the Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view in Long Island. Few men have been as successful as Sheamus in their first year with WWE. If he continues to defend the belt against men such as Cena, Randy Orton, and Triple-H, it is only a matter of time before Sheamus is regarded as *the* man on Raw.



Photo by George Napolitano

THUMBS DOWN

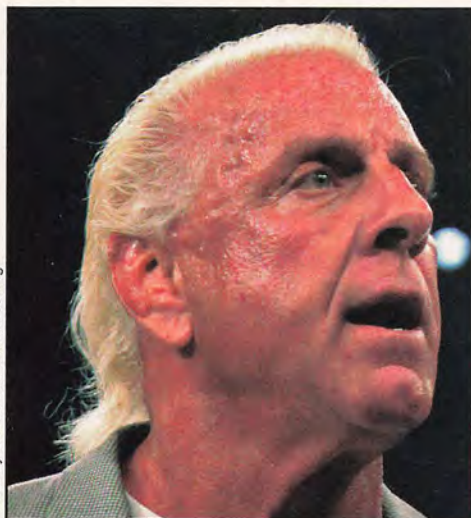


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Down to Ric Flair. Ordinarily, it would take a very heinous act for Ric Flair to earn a "Thumbs Down." In this case, the manner with which Flair has treated his supposed friend AJ Styles is cause enough. Flair, who for months proclaimed Styles the top wrestler in the world, has taken to ridiculing him publicly since losing the TNA World title to Rob Van Dam. Even worse, Flair is playing mind games with Styles, by proclaiming Kazarian as a more deserving star. What Flair stands to gain by tearing down someone with the obvious talent of Styles is anybody's guess.

Thumbs Down to Layla El. As a wrestler, Layla El was at least talented enough, on her own, to win the WWE Women's title from Beth Phoenix (even if it was in a handicap match). If that is the case, why would she allow

Lay-Cool partner Michelle McCool to wear a fake belt and pretend to be a co-champion? Having a partner to protect your back is one thing. Having someone to detract from your singles' success is another entirely.

Thumbs Down to Drew McIntyre. Since WrestleMania, it seems McIntyre's career has been on life support. In just a few months, the Scottish wrestler has gone from undefeated Intercontinental champion to a man barely capable of winning a match. From having his losing streak

swept away (multiple times), to his conflict with Smackdown GM Theodore Long, to his embarrassing I-C debacle with Kofi Kingston, McIntyre would be better served focusing on cultivating the talent that caught Vince McMahon's eye in the first place, rather than constantly looking to call in his next favor.

Thumbs Down to Austin Aries. Nobody could rightly blame Delirious if he never gets past his grudge with Austin Aries. Ring of Honor's only two-time heavyweight champion, "A-Double," became a target of Delirious this spring for a series of brutal assaults against Delirious and his valet, Daizee Haze, including targeting Delirious' throat with a ring bell and barricade, and

later punching a defenseless Haze squarely in the face. For that, there can be no justification. Say what you will about Aries as a performer, but he simply crossed the line.



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Photo By Steve Beyer

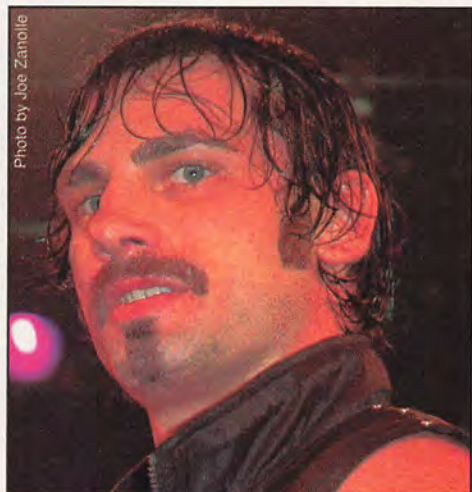


Photo by Joe Zanolle

P O I N T:

VINCE McMAHON MUST RELINQUISH VETO POWER OVER GMs

BY DAN MURPHY

WHAT IS THE point of having general managers in place to run Raw and Smackdown if their powers of authority are constantly being undermined?

That is the question Vince McMahon should be asking himself, particularly when it comes to his treatment of Smackdown GM Teddy Long. For quite some time now, McMahon has interfered in matters that have fallen under Long's jurisdiction, severely marginalizing his role.

The matter has reached a new level of concern with McMahon's blatant and shameless display of favoritism toward his "Chosen One," Drew McIntyre. On more than once occasion, McMahon has overruled decisions made by Long that have not gone to the arrogant Scotsman's liking.

And we're not talking small potatoes here. After McIntyre was fired by Long for a vicious assault on Matt Hardy, McMahon overruled the GM, reinstated McIntyre, and returned the Intercontinental title belt that had been won by Kofi Kingston in a tournament designed to fill the vacancy. Worse yet, McMahon sought to "punish" Long by actually making him face McIntyre in a match.

I can only surmise that Long is being paid quite handsomely. Otherwise, why he continues to put up with the indignity of the situation week in and week out is a question beyond reasonable approach.

Perhaps all of this shouldn't come as a surprise, as McMahon has long been known to exhibit an almost-obsessive control over all facets of his company. But, his behind-the-scenes actions of late have come at the severe detriment of the Smackdown brand.

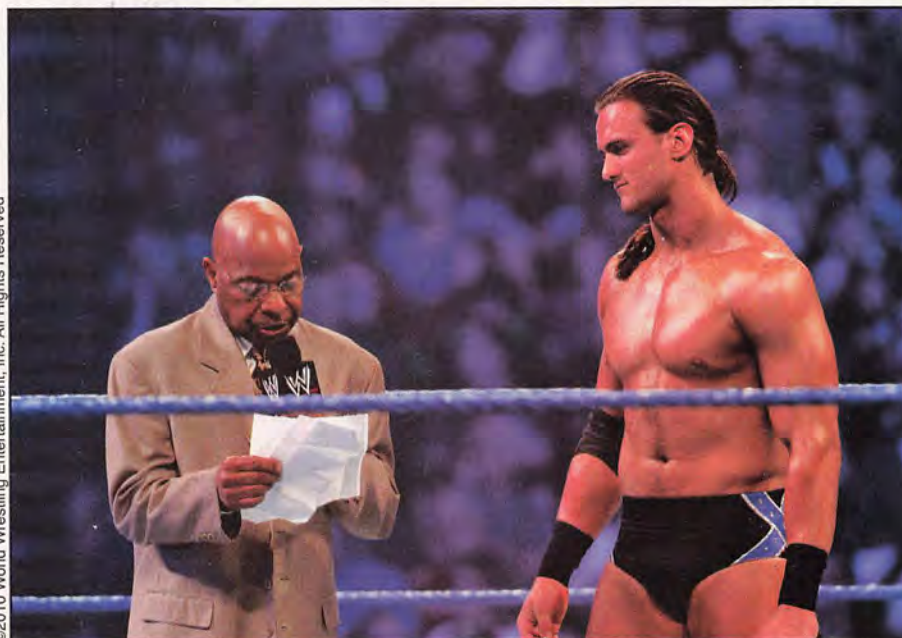
It's long past time for McMahon to stop interfering, and relinquish any and all veto powers over his brand GMs. Otherwise, they are nothing but powerless figureheads ... which, in his own twisted way, might be what McMahon actually wants.

Though McMahon has somewhat relinquished power to the new, anonymous GM for Raw, it seems as only a matter of time before he feels the need to take back some of the power he has handed over. Especially after that power lead to him being on the business end of a beatdown from the NXT contingent, lead by Wade Barrett.

Some have argued that this may be McMahon's backhanded method of motivating his young stars. But, even if true, there are so many other, much more practical ways of accomplishing that. When it comes down to it, there is simply no rationalization for McMahon's constant interference. A vote of confidence every now and then, or even a statement backing one of Long's major decisions would do wonders in terms of reestablishing Smackdown's credibility.

Imagine a wrestling show where the authority figure is not inherently evil, and is allowed to make good, honest decisions that uphold the rules and encourage fair competition. What a novel concept!

Dan Murphy is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.



Teddy Long reads Vince McMahon's order to reinstate Drew McIntyre, as the cocky young wrestler soaks in every word. There are certain powers inherent in the position of general manager that even the company CEO should not usurp, writes Dan Murphy.

C O U N T E R P O I N T :

GMs SHOULD CONSULT McMAHON BEFORE MAKING MAJOR DECISIONS

BY FRANK KREWDA

IF TEDDY LONG doesn't get it by now, he's never going to. When are people going to realize that WWE is Vince McMahon's baby, and that he is *always* going to have final say over any and all matters? Raw, Smackdown, NXT, it doesn't matter. It's his empire and, quite frankly, he's going to rule it with an iron fist.

Has Long been given a fair shake? No, certainly not. And I will readily agree with my colleague that many of the decisions McMahon has made recently with regard to Drew McIntyre have defied explanation. But, that's not the point here.

At this stage, Long—and everyone else—should know how the game works.

No major decision should ever be made without consulting McMahon first. Regardless of his reasoning, did Long really think that McMahon would brush off the firing of a young stud who McMahon himself claims to have discovered and has heralded as a future world champ?

The problem is, Long wasn't thinking. And he could have saved himself a lot of heartache and embarrassment by simply seeking out McMahon before making the on-the-fly decision to strip McIntyre of his Intercontinental title and fire him following the Matt Hardy incident.

The same goes for whoever has replaced Bret Hart as GM of Raw. Regardless of McMahon's relationship with this person, sooner or later they are going to clash. What that person needs to understand is that he or she is on McMahon's payroll now, not the other way around. When the inevitable blowup happens, McMahon likely will not be in the right from a moral standpoint. But, in the sense that he is the boss, he is technically never wrong. Like it or not.

Say what you will about Vickie Guerrero, but she always seems to have been able to grasp what Long and others can't. During her various stints in the general manager role, Guerrero rarely made popular decisions that the fans were able to get behind. But she kept a close and constant line of communication with McMahon. That, primarily, is why she enjoyed such a long run as Smackdown GM, and why she was given a shot at the Raw job

before she decided to quit. Long should take a look at history, and a cue from his former assistant, before it's too late.

For the brand GMs, being on the same page as McMahon isn't always essential. Character clashes are, after all, a large part of what makes the wrestling world go around. But, acting impulsively, making rash, monumental decisions that will in various ways impact the daily proceedings of a multimillion-dollar company without the blessing of the man behind it all is simply not smart.

McMahon has imparted a great deal of trust in his brand GMs, and in turn, they should respect the importance of the roles they've been chosen for. Being a GM isn't—or shouldn't be—a ticket to hold free reign over Raw or Smackdown.

The GMs have the power to hire performers, make trades, put together weekly shows, matches, and pay-per-views. But, when it comes to major decisions—firing employees, stripping champions, etc.—McMahon should always be consulted.

Otherwise, it is the Chairman's authority that is essentially being undermined. And that is a scenario that should never happen.

Frank Krewda is editor-in-chief of *THE WRESTLER*. □



Long could have saved himself from being in this humiliating position if he had just consulted McMahon before taking such drastic action against the chairman's "Chosen One," writes Frank Krewda. This is something GMs should know by now.

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INTRODUCING

THE SHEIK



Photo by B.J. Fleming

TEHHRAN, IRAN, IS home to a new nightmare with an old name that conjures up long-forgotten psychological terror in the hearts of fans and wrestlers alike.

Since 2008, The Sheik—a *new* Sheik—has been terrorizing the rings of NWA Florida/Pro Wrestling Fusion. And much like his predecessor, this Sheik's violence has produced a short list of wrestlers that are eager to take him on.

Thirty-six-year-old veteran Joseph Cabibbo sought the blessing of Ed Farhat's family to use the name, and it was granted by Sabu, a nephew and trainee of the original Sheik. Obviously, Sabu saw something special enough in the 6'6", 252-pounder to allow him to inherit Farhat's legacy.

As is the case with many wrestlers, Cabibbo's love affair with professional wrestling began at a very young age. But unlike most three-year-olds, he relished watching the violence that unfolded more than anything else.

"Growing up, I was a huge fan of the ring monsters, such as Abdullah the Butcher, Bruiser Brody, Kevin Sullivan, and, of course, The original Sheik," he recalled. "For me, there was nothing better than seeing the little children run from them in fear. I loved seeing their foes in the ring with the wild look in their eyes."

In particular, Cabibbo recalls spending his earliest years admiring Dusty Rhodes and the Funks in Florida Championship Wrestling. "I can still picture it as clear as yesterday," he said. "I got burned after touching a motorcycle, I was three years old. Here I was, run-

ning inside to cry to my mother that I was hurt, and there on the TV set was Dusty Rhodes. I was instantly hooked. Before long, I was dragging my father, religiously, to the wrestling brawls in West Palm Beach."

Several hook-toed boots, turbans, and bloody opponents later, The Sheik finds himself leaving a trail of bodies as bloody as his heroes in Florida once did. Today, The Sheik is recognized as the first man to hold the NWA's "triple crown" of a heavyweight (Florida), regional (Midwest), and continental (North American) championship, simultaneously.

With moves such as his camel clutch, hook clothesline, and hangman's neckbreaker, the self-dubbed "Iranian Assassin" takes great pride in his repertoire. But according to The Sheik, no amount of in-ring skill or aggressiveness gets him as far as his ability to inflict psychological terror on those who see him walking the aisle. Fear, he believes, has always been his most trusty weapon.

"I guess you could call it the 'Mike Tyson Syndrome,'" he explains. "For a while there, just the sight of 'Iron Mike' walking to the ring caused people to lose it. The psychological factor is so much more intimidating than any amount of physical damage I might inflict. I love it when people are scared of me, wide-eyed, and freaking out, before I even step into the ring. That's when I know I have the upper hand in our match."

Of course, it is tough to intimidate your opponent unless you have a fearsome reputation, and The Sheik added to his when he brutalized former WWF star Savio Vega in a memorably bloody feud in Puerto Rico last year. Sheik's feud with the former Intercontinental champion culminated in a Globe of Death match inside a weapons-filled ball of steel.

Long before balls of steel, fire, or any other nightmarish weapons, there was just Joseph Cabibbo, whose journey to becoming The Sheik began at age 18 when he and close friend/former tag partner Shawn Murphy enrolled in former WCW wrestler Casey Thompson's wrestling school. Even though Thompson hardly had a reputation as one of WCW's more successful stars, he was renowned for being a smooth wrestler that contemporaries such as Arn Anderson

and Ron Simmons loved to compete against. Before long, Cabibbo began drawing inspiration from other local, Florida-based greats, such as Blackjack Mulligan and Joe and Dean Malenko.

The Sheik considers himself a very tough, very old-school type of wrestler, and credits this style to the training he received at the hands of Thompson, Mulligan, and the Malenkos.

"It has been a long, incredible journey from my days as Joseph Cabibbo," recalled The Sheik. "It took me a long time to get to where I am now, and I'm a much smarter wrestler than I was back then. I'm not intrigued by the glory or the fame, like a lot of the younger wrestlers. I'm just looking to uphold a fine reputation for instilling terror, like the original Sheik before me."

"Upholding a fine reputation for instilling terror"? That's what the man said. □



Photo by Jake Sposetta

Evoking the sadistic tactics of the original Sheik, the modern-day madman gouges the eyes of his unfortunate opponent, Apollo. Just knowing rivals are intimidated by his use of these tactics gives him an edge, says The Sheik.

WORKIN' STIFF

BY AL CASTLE

INSIDE A WOODEN trunk filled with linens at the foot of my bed you could still find a faded pillowcase bearing the likenesses of Hulk Hogan, Junkyard Dog, Roddy Piper, and other characters from the mid-1980s Saturday morning cartoon show, *Hulk Hogan's Rock 'n' Wrestling*.

The pillowcase came from a bedding set I got when I was around seven, and the animated series sought to cash in on what was a large segment of WWF's fan base at the time—kids.

Indeed, the 1980s WWF product seemed perfectly catered to

me when I was elementary school age. Storylines, like the one involving the kidnapping of the British Bulldogs' adorable mascot, Matilda, appealed to my youthful innocence. And while more mature, pro wrestling purists may have been nauseated by the kiddie product being put out by WWE at the time, the company saw a gigantic business boon going in that direction.

Several years later, when I was a teenager and starting to learn more about the real world, I was drawn to some of the WWF's slightly more sophisticated storylines. The family feud between Bret and Owen Hart intrigued me, as did Jake Roberts' despicable attack on Miss Elizabeth, as her husband, Randy Savage, lay prone on the mat. I was coming of age, and the WWF was, too.

When I reached my early-20s, and was partaking in the kind of revelry that young men are prone to, there on my TV every Monday was a brand of entertainment that reflected what excited me at that age—rock music, scantily clad women, foul-mouthed anti-heroes, and a healthy dose of alcohol consumption, courtesy of "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. The anti-authority Attitude Era was exactly what the doctor ordered in the late-1990s and early-2000s.

About two years ago, some time after my 30th birthday, WWE made the decision to change its television programming rating from TV-14 to TV-PG. It so happens that this was right around when I was becoming a father for the first time. Now responsible for molding another young mind, I could appreciate the role of sports and entertainment in instilling values in its youngest fans—values like hard work, doing right by your friends, and treating others the way you want to be treated.

In other words: Hustle, loyalty, respect.

The way I see it, not only have I grown up with WWE, but WWE has grown up with me. From my days as a young rug rat playing with my Hulkamania Workout Set, through the present, when I sometimes find my son clutching his C.M. Punk teddy bear in his bed, it seems that the

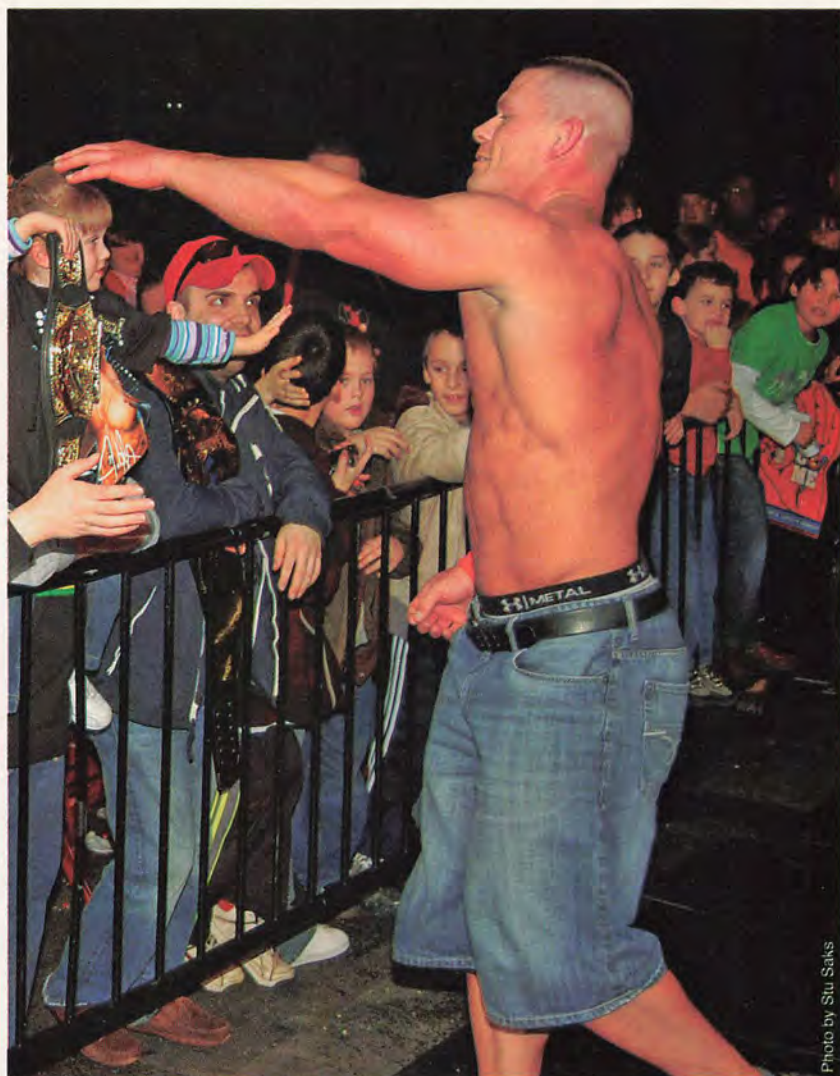


Photo by Stu Saks

John Cena greets his young fans before a match in Philadelphia. It's comforting for Al Castle to know that he can bring his son to a WWE event and not have to be concerned that he will be exposed to something inappropriate.

wrestling product I grew up on has come full circle.

Obviously, not everyone is thrilled with WWE's new kid-friendly direction. Fans who are at the age now that I was when Sable was parading around in pasties, may crave more salaciousness from WWE, which has gone as far, in recent months, as interrupting matches at the first hint of blood flow.

But I, for one, commend WWE for moving in this direction. For certain, there are reasons to be skeptical about WWE's motivations in toning down its product. It may be more than a convenient coincidence that much of WWE's efforts in cleaning up its act coincide with former WWE CEO Linda McMahon's campaign for the U.S. Senate.

But, whatever their reasons, the way I see it, WWE can't go wrong by taking the high road. The world's largest pro wrestling promotion only stands to grow larger by extending its reach to the youngest of fans, for whom real-life superheroes like Rey Mysterio Jr. and John Cena can be every bit as appealing as Spiderman and Batman.

It's the kids who beg their parents to buy them WWE toys and T-shirts. It's the kids who will pack arenas and cheer the loudest for the good guys. And, most importantly, it's the kids who will some day have kids of their own. And if you could convert one person into becoming a lifetime wrestling fan, you have a decent chance of creating several more generations of them.

Now, none of this is to say that offering a family-friendly product is the only way to run a wrestling company. TNA remains rife with the blood baths, sexual suggestiveness, and four letter words that might be right up some fans' alleys. But I wouldn't feel comfortable with my son watching Abyss' flesh punctured by dozens of thumb tacks, or proclaiming himself one of Ken Anderson's "****holes."

That said, WWE is certainly no *Sesame Street*—even since its politically correct facelift. Divas still wrestle in their underwear and Triple-H still won't pass up the opportunity to make a gay joke.

Reasonable people could disagree as to whether children have any business at all watching a brand of entertainment built on adults settling disputes through violence. But, ultimately, it comes down to parenting: filtering out that which kids shouldn't see, letting them enjoy the parts that are okay,

and making tough calls about the ones that fall somewhere in the middle.

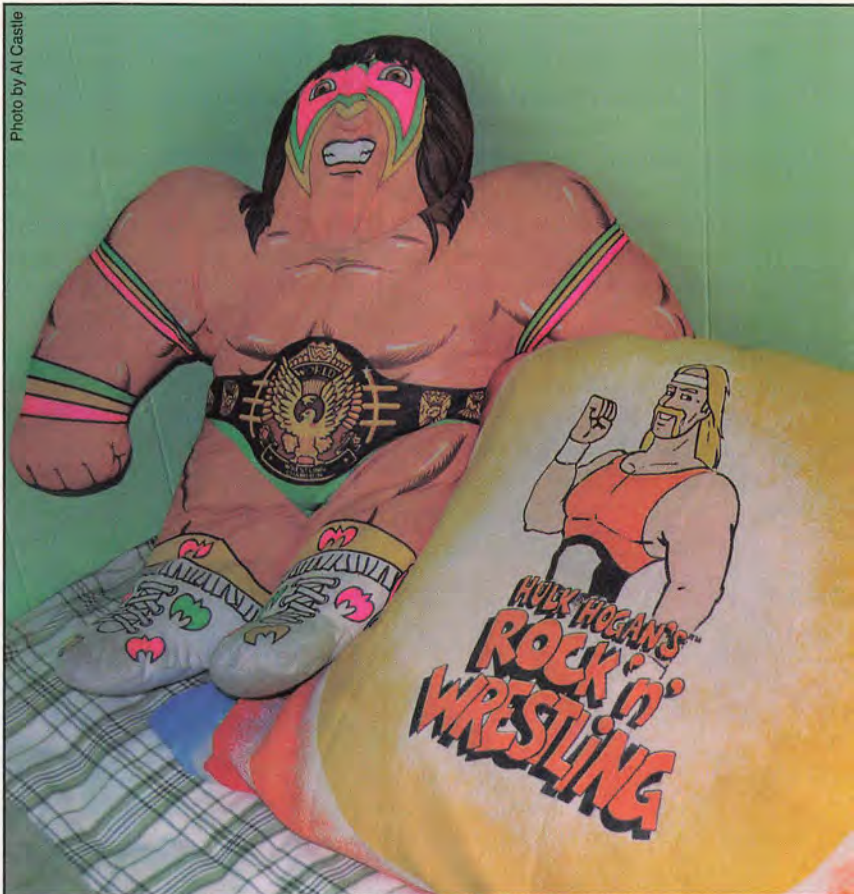
But the point is this: The ideal wrestling product, in my mind, is the one that can appeal to fans of all ages. WWE has made strides as of late in creating such a product in which a 10-year-old boy can pop for The Undertaker's awesome entrance, and in which his dad can pop for the awesome match he had against Shawn Michaels.

And, personally, I am grateful for a WWE product that I can watch with my son—even if it sometimes feels like it caters more to him than me.

And to go full circle—just as WWE has done over the past 25 years—I'll leave you with this tidbit: WWE officials recently announced that they are working on a WWE cartoon show for Nickelodeon.

I wonder if they'll put out a bedding set.

Photo by Al Castle



Straight from the Al Castle collection, two of his childhood favorites, The Ultimate Warrior and Hulk Hogan. WWE has come full-circle in its marketing approach. Some folks are happy about it; others are not.

[SPOTLIGHT ON . . .]

THE UNDERTAKER

BORN IN HOUSTON, Texas, on March 24, 1965 ... Played basketball at Waltrip High School, where he graduated in 1983 ... Trained by "The Spoiler" Don Jardine ... Made his debut in World Class Championship Wrestling in 1984 under the name Texas Red ... Lost to Bruiser Brody in his first match ... Joined the Continental Wrestling Association in 1988 ... Promotion soon became the United States Wrestling Association after promoter Jerry Jarrett merged the CWA and WCCW ... As the Master of Pain, won his first championship, defeating Jerry "The King" Lawler for the USWA Unified heavyweight title ... Dropped the title back to Lawler after a 24-day reign ... Under the name The Punisher, captured the WCWA Texas heavyweight championship from Eric Embry via forfeit ... Lost the belt to Kerry Von Erich two weeks later ... Joined World Championship Wrestling in late-1989 ... As "Mean" Mark Callous, teamed with "Dangerous" Dan Spivey as The Skyscrapers ... Stood 6'10",

with Spivey being two inches shorter ... Team was managed by Teddy Long ... Began feud with The Road Warriors, which ended abruptly when Spivey left WCW ... Moved into singles competition, under the guidance of Paul E. Dangerously ... Fell short in bid to take U.S title from Lex Luger at The Great American Bash ... Left WCW after non-televised loss to NWA World champion Sting ... Traveled overseas for brief stint in New Japan as "Punisher" Dice Morgan ... Returned briefly to USWA ... Participated in tournament to determine new USWA champion ... Defeated Bill Dundee in the first round, but lost to Jerry Lawler in the quarterfinals ... Signed with the WWF in October 1990 ... Transformed into Kane The Undertaker ... Persona was modeled after a mortician from old Western movies ... Wore trench coat, black hat with long gray gloves, and boot covers ... Took on zombie-like demeanor, becoming virtually impervious to pain ... Made on-camera debut at Survivor Series as a member of



February 1990: With partner Dan Spivey, takes on The Road Warriors in a bitter feud in WCW.

THE UNDERTAKER



Photo by George Napolitano



July 1990: Takes Paul E. Dangerously as manager as focus shifts to singles wrestling after Spivey's abrupt departure from WCW.

"Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase's team ... Eliminated Koko B. Ware one minute into the match with his Tombstone piledriver ... Also eliminated Dusty Rhodes before being counted out ... Managed initially by Brother Love ... Dropped "Kane" from his name ... Switched managers from Love to Paul Bearer, a rotund mortician with a ghastly sneer ... Bearer carried around an urn from which he claimed The Undertaker drew mystical powers ... Destroyed "Superfly" Jimmy Snuka at WrestleMania 7, beginning famed WrestleMania winning streak ... Locked The Ultimate Warrior in an air-tight casket during an infamous episode of Bearer's "Funeral Parlor" ... Battled the Warrior, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, Sid Justice, and Sgt. Slaughter in high-profile matches ... Defeated Hulk Hogan for the WWF World title at Survivor Series, with the help of "Nature Boy" Ric Flair and a steel chair ... WWF President Jack Tunney ordered a rematch five days later at This Tuesday in Texas, where Hogan won the title back ... Earned fans' cheers when he saved Miss Elizabeth from an attack by former ally Jake "The Snake" Roberts ... Beat Roberts at WrestleMania VIII, following a Tombstone on the floor ... Feuded with Harvey Wippleman charges Kamala and Giant Gonzales ... Defeated Kamala in first televised Casket match at Survivor Series ... Lost Casket match to WWF champion Yokozuna at Royal Rumble, with assistance of numerous Yokozuna cohorts ... "Spirit" appeared from inside the casket, warning of an eventual return ... During hiatus, Ted DiBiase introduced an impostor Undertaker, passing him off as the real thing ... Returned to soundly defeat his evil doppelgänger at SummerSlam, following three Tombstone piledrivers ... Replaced gray attire with updated purple look ... Beat Yokozuna in a return Casket match at Survivor Series ... Defeated King



November 1993: Gets revenge on Yokozuna after the big Samoan eliminated him from the Royal Rumble months earlier.

Kong Bundy via DQ at WrestleMania 11 ... During match, urn was stolen by Kama, who then melted it down for a necklace ... Beat Kama in a Casket match at SummerSlam ... Broke orbital bone in match with Yokozuna, requiring surgery ... Returned at Survivor Series wearing phantom-like mask covering upper face ... Defeated Diesel at WrestleMania 12 ... Attacked the following night by Mankind, kicking off a long feud ... Lost Boiler Room Brawl to Mankind at SummerSlam after being turned on by Bearer ... Defeated Mankind in a Buried Alive match ... Feuded with Vader, who was now being managed by Bearer ... Lost to Vader at the Royal Rumble ... Pinned Sycho Sid at WrestleMania 13 to become a two-time WWF champion ... Bearer attempted a reunion, using the threat of a "big secret" ... Secret turned out to be that Undertaker's younger brother Kane, long since assumed killed in a fire as a child, was alive ... Bearer accused The Undertaker of setting the fire and murdering his



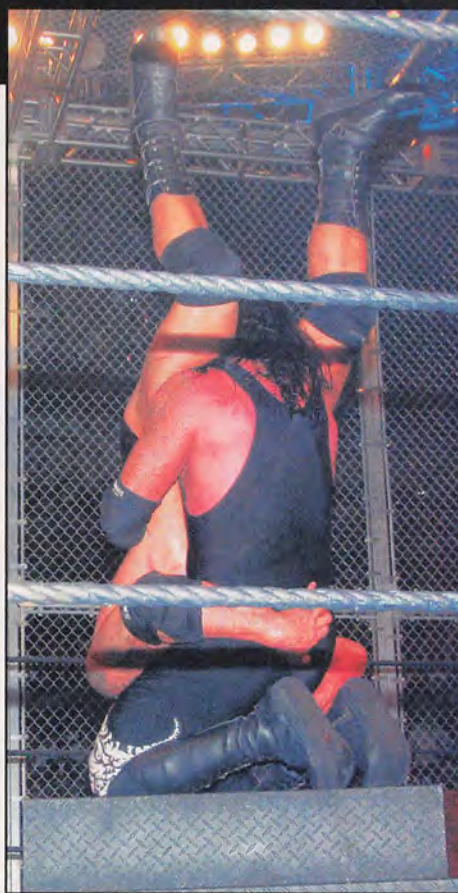
March 1997: At WrestleMania 13, defeats Sycho Sid to win his second WWE World championship.



September 2001: Forms a partnership with his brother, Kane, after an earlier reconciliation. Undertaker would soon rejoin Paul Bearer and turn on Kane.

family ... Lost WWF championship to Bret Hart at SummerSlam after being accidentally hit with steel chair by special referee Shawn Michaels ... Lost to Michaels in first Hell in a Cell match after Kane made debut ... After being reluctant to fight his brother, finally defeated Kane at WrestleMania XIV ... Beat Kane in first ever Inferno Match at Unforgiven ... Renewed feud with Mankind ... Famously threw Mankind from the top of Hell in a Cell structure and chokeslammed him through the roof of the cage at King of the Ring ... Teamed with "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin to briefly take WWF World tag team title from Kane and Mankind ... Began working with Kane, showing villainous tendencies ... Simultaneously pinned WWE champion Austin with Kane in triple-threat match, but title was ruled vacant ... Reconciled with Bearer after turning on Kane ... Admitted to setting the fire that killed his parents ... Formed the Ministry of Darkness stable, taking on the "Lord Of Darkness" persona ... Claimed to answer to a "Higher Power" ... Defeated Austin for

third WWE title reign at Over the Edge ... Higher Power was revealed as Vince McMahon ... Ministry of Darkness and Corporation merged to form the short-lived Corporate Ministry ... Dropped WWE title back to Austin ... Corporate Ministry dissolved ... Formed Unholy Alliance with The Big Show, winning WWE tag title on two occasions ... After hiatus, returned in a new biker persona, completely disregarding supernatural character ... Targeted the McMahon-Helmsley faction, again making him a fan favorite ... Began using Last Ride power bomb finisher ... Improved WrestleMania winning streak to 9-0 by pinning Triple-H at WrestleMania X-Seven ... With



November 2007: Finally gets WWE champion Batista in a cell at Survivor Series, but fails to win the match and title.

Kane Beat Edge and Christian for WWF tag title ... Quickly lost them to Austin and Triple-H ... Feuded with "Diamond" Dallas Page, who stalked his family during the WCW Invasion ... Briefly held both WWF and WCW World tag team title with Kane ... Teamed with Kane, The Rock, Chris Jericho, and The Big Show at Survivor Series to eliminate the Alliance (Austin, Angle, Booker T, Rob Van Dam, and Shane McMahon) ... Again turned on fans, attacking announcer Jim Ross and forcing him to join McMahon's "Kiss My Ass Club" ... Cut hair short and began referring to himself as "Big Evil" ... Shockingly eliminated from Royal Rumble match by Maven ... Defeated "Nature Boy" Ric Flair in no-DQ match at WrestleMania X8 ... Defeated



April 2008: Undertaker uses his Hell's Gate chokehold to take the World title from Edge at Backlash. Smackdown General Manager Vickie Guerrero would later ban the move, reverse the result of the match, strip 'Taker of the title, and suspend him.



August 2009: Making an unexpected return at SummerSlam, The Undertaker attacks new WWE World champion C.M. Punk after Punk defeats Jeff Hardy in a Tables, Ladders, and Chairs match.

Hulk Hogan for fourth WWE title at Judgement Day ... Was taken to the limit by Jeff Hardy in ladder match on *Smackdown* ... Began to hear cheers again after showing respect for Hardy's efforts ... Lost WWE title to The Rock ... Feuded with next titleholder, Brock Lesnar ... Defeated The Big Show and A-Train in handicap match at WrestleMania 19, with help of Nathan Jones ... Foiled in attempt to take WWE title from Lesnar, thanks to McMahon ... Lost to McMahon in Buried Alive match at Survivor Series, thanks to interference from Kane ... After hiatus, returned in "Dead Man" persona at WrestleMania XX, defeating Kane ... Was also accompanied again by Paul Bearer ... Defeated Paul Heyman charges The Dudley Boyz at The Great American Bash ... Afterward, buried Bearer in cement, claiming he was now a mere liability ... Feuded with WWE champion John Bradshaw Layfield and John Heidenreich ... Overcame interference of "Cowboy" Bob Orton to defeat Randy Orton at WrestleMania 21 ... Feuded with Orton for several months, finally winning a Hell in a Cell match at Armageddon ... Lost to Kurt Angle in lauded 30-minute WWE title bout at No Way Out ... Feuded with Mark Henry, whom he defeated in Casket match at WrestleMania 22 ... Was attacked and subsequently feuded with a debuting Great Khali ... Beat Khali in Last-Man-Standing match on *Smackdown* ... Reunited with Kane as the Brothers of Destruction, feuding with brash upstarts Mr. Kennedy and MVP ... Won first Royal Rumble match in 2007, eliminating

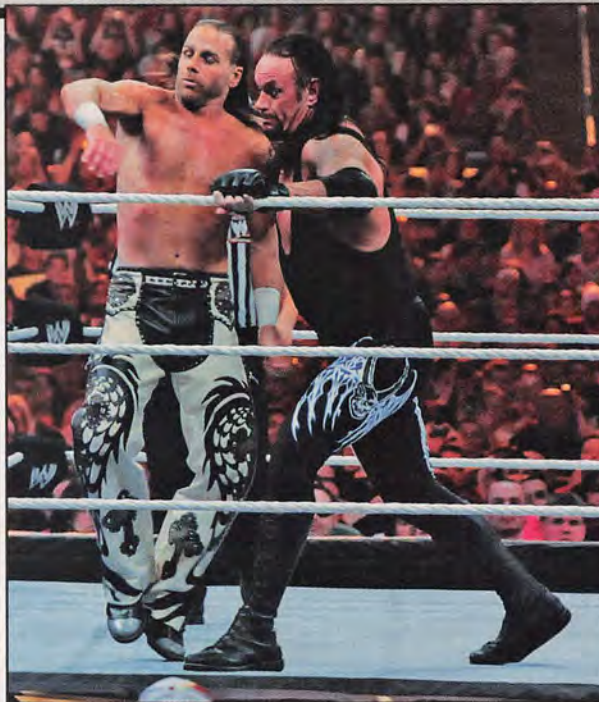


Photo by George Napolitano

March 2010: In their second WrestleMania classic, The Undertaker preserves his WM winning streak, while ending Shawn Michaels' career.

former rival Shawn Michaels ... Targeted World champion Batista, whom he beat for the belt at WrestleMania 23 ... After going to a draw with Batista in steel cage match on *Smackdown*, was attacked by Mark Henry ... Edge then cashed in Money in the Bank stipulation to win the title ... Took another hiatus ... At No Way Out, beat Batista, Finlay, Khali, MVP, and Big Daddy V to become number-one contender to Edge's WWE title ... Beat Edge for the championship at WrestleMania 24, extending WM winning streak to 16-0 ... Hell's Gate submission hold was ruled illegal by Smackdown GM Vickie Guerrero ... After using the hold on Edge in rematch, was stripped of title ... Lost to Edge at One Night Stand, leaving Smackdown as per stipulation ... After being reinstated, beat Edge in Hell in a Cell match at SummerSlam ... Feuded with The Big Show, beating him in a casket match at Survivor Series ... Defeated Shawn Michaels in the *PWI* Match of the Year at WrestleMania 25, then took lengthy hiatus ... Technically suffered first submission loss of his career after being screwed by WWE World champion C.M. Punk, Smackdown GM Teddy Long, and referee Scott Armstrong at Breaking Point ... Beat Punk for the title at Hell in a Cell PPV ... Successfully defended in competitive match against Rey Mysterio Jr. at Royal Rumble ... Lost title to Chris Jericho at Elimination Chamber after interference by Michaels ... Initially declined to face Michaels in rematch at WrestleMania ... Finally accepted, on condition that Michaels had to put his career on the line ... Pinned Michaels after a Tombstone to end HBK's wrestling career and extend his own WrestleMania winning streak to an amazing 18-0 ... Suffered concussion and broken orbital bone in win over Mysterio on *Smackdown* ... Was said to be found by Kane in an unresponsive "vegetative state" over Memorial Day weekend ... The search for the culprit continued as of press time. □

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[Q & A]

DORY FUNK JR.

"I was often the bad guy, although I'm really a very nice guy"

FROM A MODERN-DAY perspective, a four-year title reign seems incredible, especially one as demanding as Dory Funk Jr.'s run as NWA World heavyweight champion from 1969 to 1973. That will forever be his most lasting impression on the business. But, as Funk demonstrates in this "Q&A," his total impact on pro wrestling reaches well beyond four years during the Nixon administration.

Dory Funk Sr. groomed his son for greatness, with "Junior" pushing all-time legends such as Pat O'Connor, Verne Gagne, and Lou Thesz to the limit as early as the mid-1960s. He and brother Terry became the cornerstone of the Amarillo territory, which truly was the family business. And, of course, Dory Jr.'s reputation grew far and wide as he faced challengers such as Jack Brisco, Harley Race, Johnny Valentine, and Wahoo McDaniel as the NWA's traveling World champion during the early-'70s.

The second-generation star retained that championship luster long after losing the title, remaining in demand in Florida, the Mid-Atlantic, Tennessee, All-Japan, and countless territories worldwide. He collected regional championships virtually everywhere he went during his 6,000-match career. And, teaming with Terry and faux brother Jimmy Jack Funk (Jesse Barr), he even had a run as "Hoss" Funk in the WWF in the mid-1980s.

Dory Jr. credits his family for his happiness inside and outside the ring. The influence of his father and brother is well documented, but he is quick to mention his mother, Dorothy Funk Culver, who passed away in 2009, and Marti Funk, his wife for the past 25 years. He has three children: Dr. Dory Funk, a physician in Paonia, Colorado; Penny Dustman, a special education teacher in Friona, Texas; and Adam Dirk Funk, the head of computer education for the Amarillo Independent School System. His grandson, Dory Funk IV, is training to be a wrestler in his own right.

Dory and Marti established the Funking Conservatory, based in Ocala, Florida, as arguably the most respected training school anywhere. The 69-year-old has even become a major presence on the Web through dory-funk.com, his various online columns, MySpace, Facebook, and even his own YouTube channel.

With the passage of time, and deaths of contemporaries Gene Kiniski and Jack Brisco, Funk's achievements are held in higher regard than ever. He and brother Terry were inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2009, and *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* recently presented Dory with a Legends Award in St. Louis.

"Dory's career dates back to 1963, but his awareness of pro wrestling goes back even further, to the mid-1940s when his father

broke into the business," noted Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who received a 90-minute education from Funk in this "Q&A" interview. "I have never encountered another wrestler whose experience dates that far back, yet has remained completely in tune with the current product. He's a fountain of knowledge."

Q: Just to let you know my personal perspective on your career, I saw you for the first time when you were wrestling for Jim Crockett Promotions in the Mid-Atlantic in the early-'80s and I remember those great matches between you and Jack Brisco for the Mid-Atlantic title. That was my introduction to Dory Funk Jr.

A: Jack was a big influence on my life in professional wrestling. He was a really fabulous opponent. And he had a credible background, being an NCAA amateur wrestling champion. He was just a super athlete.

Q: So what was your immediate reaction to his death not long ago?

A: I knew he had been sick, but he seemed to be on his way back. It caught me completely off-guard. He was such a super guy to work with in the ring and an enjoyable guy to be around out of the ring also.

Q: Considering some of the passings of the past few months, I wonder if you're feeling alone out there. Gene Kiniski, another former NWA World champion, died shortly after Brisco. It seems like you're the last man standing from that era, someone who can give testimony as to what it was like to be NWA champion at that time.

A: [Laughs] Hey, I've still got my brother standing next to me.

Q: That's right. I didn't mean to kill him off yet. That brings something to mind: People often thought of Lou Thesz as the elder statesman of wrestling, the oldest living NWA World champion, and he had been champion for so long. It seems like, here in 2010, you're regarded in the same light. Have you ever thought about that?

A: I haven't put a lot of thought into that. I do know I've been around wrestling for all of my life and it's part of my life. On several occasions, I've made efforts to get away from it, but I always come back to it. Wrestling is something I know, something I love, and something I can do well. That's why I've stayed with it all along in one way or another, whether in the ring, training, or being the booker of a territory.



Photo by Marti Funk



Three generations of Funks, 1955: grandfather Sgt. Adam Funk, Southwest Texas champion Dory Funk Sr., and 15-year-old Dory Jr., already developing a star athlete's physique.

Back in the Amarillo days, I was the owner of a territory. A long time ago, when I told my father I wanted to become a professional wrestler, he said, "It can be very good for you. You can have a very healthy body and a very happy life." It's been that way in my case.

Q: What impact did your father, Dory Funk Sr., have on pro wrestling?

A: He was in a lot of rugged battles. He was the originator of some very violent matches, including the Texas Death Match. That was his origination, his creation. He had some very wild



Dory played a prominent role on the West Texas State football team that beat Ohio State, 15-14, in the 1962 Sun Bowl. Funk gave some thought to pro football, but there was little doubt how he would ultimately earn a living.

matches against Fritz Von Erich in the Amarillo territory.

Q: I remember seeing some incredible black-and-white photos of his Texas Death Matches in our archives from the '60s and early-'70s, particularly one against Cyclone Negro, which looked brutal.

A: Cyclone Negro was one of the very best. He was in the Amarillo territory, and we depended on him as one of our top heels for a long, long time. He had some legendary matches with my father.

Q: I don't think any other wrestling name has been linked to so many wrestlers over so many generations as the Funk name. Of course, I'm going to bring up the West Texas connection and the people who came out of there, like Stan Hansen, Tito Santana, Ted DiBiase, and Tully Blanchard. Whether it's been your Funking Conservatory or wrestlers learning the ropes through your Amarillo promotion, you've been associated with a lot of guys over the years. It's really incredible.

A: People have asked me about the West Texas connection and wrestlers who played football at West Texas and went on to become professional wrestlers. I credit that to my father, Dory Funk Sr., who was such a famous name within the Amarillo territory in those days. A lot of kids playing football at the time happened to be big, strong athletes, and they went into the business because of Dory Funk Sr.'s influence and the general respect for professional wrestling he created in the Amarillo area.

Q: I remember Ted DiBiase telling me that when he was attending West Texas State that just watching your Saturday morning television show was a huge influence on him.

A: Oh, the television program was awesome. It's very competitive now for television ratings, but in those days, there were only three television stations to watch, so the average rating was a 33 share! [Laughs] Professional wrestling was so popular in each area. The Amarillo territory included West Texas down through El Paso, Albuquerque up through Colorado, including Colorado Springs and Pueblo, and back in through Lubbock and Odessa. All those people really saw professional wrestling only as it was produced in Amarillo, Texas.

Q: We were talking about your West Texas connection earlier. An interesting factoid I came across was about your debut match against Don Fargo. You used your West Texas connection—by having a guy named Jerry Logan in your corner—as a way to hype your match. Who was Jerry Logan?

A: Jerry Logan was an All-American football player from West Texas. He was in my corner. Don Fargo had Jim Dalton in his corner. I had the whole West Texas football team at ringside. I had the whole Tascosa High School amateur wrestling team there. I also had my father, my mother, and my brother, plus all the friends I grew up with in Amarillo. So that was quite a pressurized situation.

Q: Much has been made of the strong start of your career. You seemed destined to be champion. You scored wins over veterans like Pat O'Connor and you wrestled Verne

"Jack was a big influence on my life in professional wrestling. He was a really fabulous opponent. And he had a credible background, being an NCAA amateur wrestling champion. He was just a super athlete."

Gagne to a draw. Were you being groomed to win the World title from the start?

A: I had great opportunities to work with all those people, both Kiniski and Lou Thesz in my first year, and, like you said, Verne Gagne and Pat O'Connor. My father told me that you only learn from working on top with the very best. I don't think I was looked at that strongly as potentially world-championship material in my first year, but I did have a special entrance into the business through my father. He was a brilliant man. I'll tell you why: My dad never made it easy on Terry or me coming into the business. When he corrected us, it was in no uncertain terms in front of the wrestlers, telling us straight out if we were doing something wrong. I'll just set the scene: He would really



Interview Photos by Marti Funk



Dad spent as much time as he could with Junior, discussing life in general (above) and wrestling in particular (above right). Even though he was on the road much of the time, Dory Sr. was there when it mattered, like when his son needed help unmasking The Red Raider (Art Neilson) in 1965 (right).





Dory wasn't quite ready for NWA World champion Lou Thesz in 1964 as a 23-year-old, but the all-time great would never forget how close the upstart came to upsetting him. Pat O'Connor and Verne Gagne were also pushed to the limit by young Dory Jr.



On February 11, 1969, Funk won the NWA World title (above) from the man who was able to beat Thesz, Gene Kiniski. Gene was still barking about the title loss at a WCW dinner in 1993, and Gordon Solie was on hand to memorialize the proceedings (right).

get on his hay, to the point that the wrestlers in the dressing room would get behind me. My father would jump on me so strong that they would get behind me. They would back me up, as opposed to a situation where the father is always bragging on the kid.

Q: Do you think he was really trying to get your peers behind you, but didn't let you in on the secret?

A: I think so, I really do.

Q: I remember your brother saying pretty much the same thing. He said your father never told you or Terry when you had a good match, but he sure as hell told you when you had a bad one.

A: If I saw my father after a match and he said nothing, then that was a super-compliment. He gave me a fabulous entrance into the professional wrestling business. Looking back at my first year in the wrestling business, it's unbelievable the people I had the opportunity to work with. That, plus the learning experience of being NWA World champion and traveling throughout the world, territory to territory, on a daily and for sure a weekly basis. I learned from every one of my opponents.

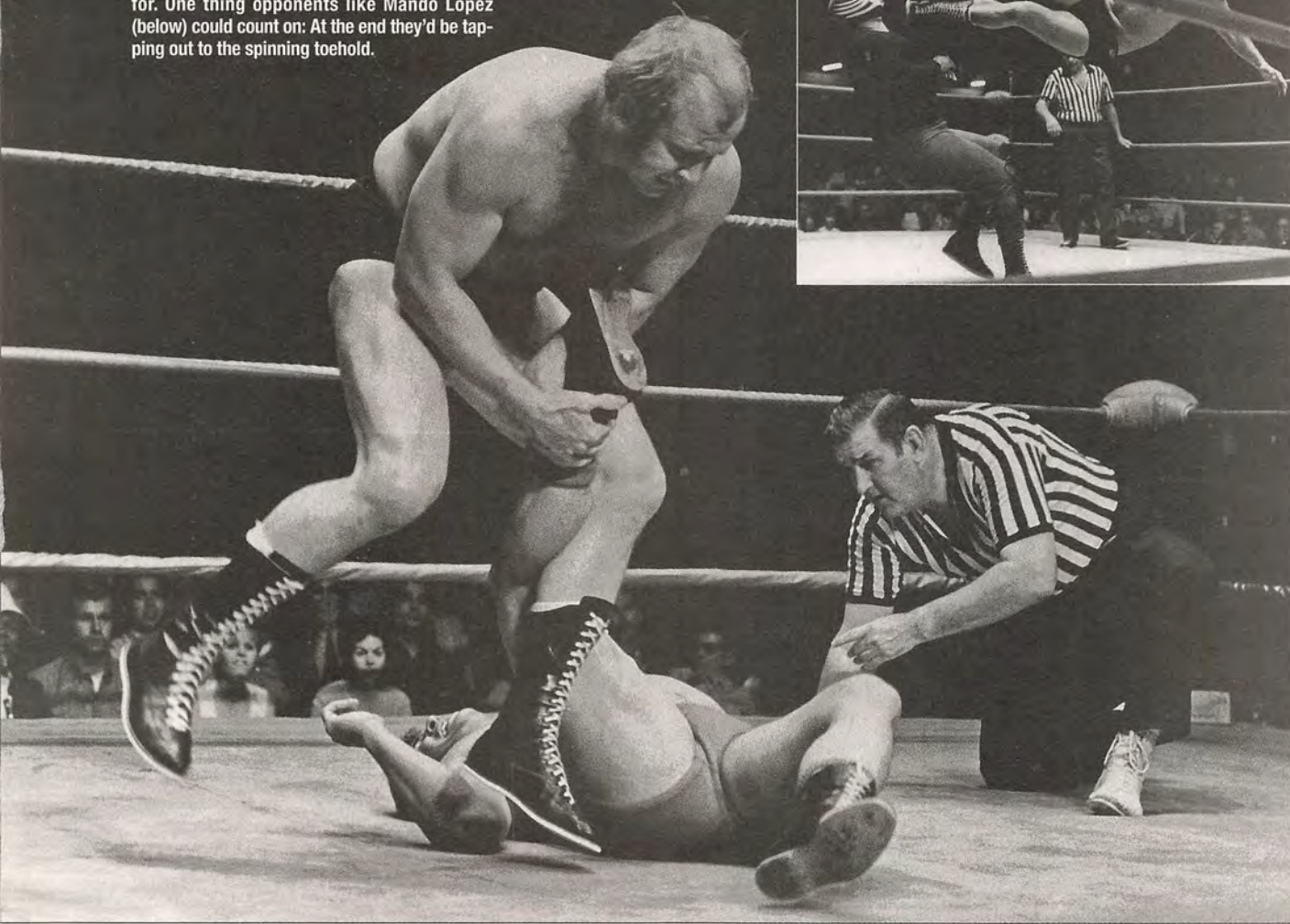
Q: What did it feel like when you won the World title in Tampa? Your father was in your corner. How did Gene Kiniski feel about the whole thing?

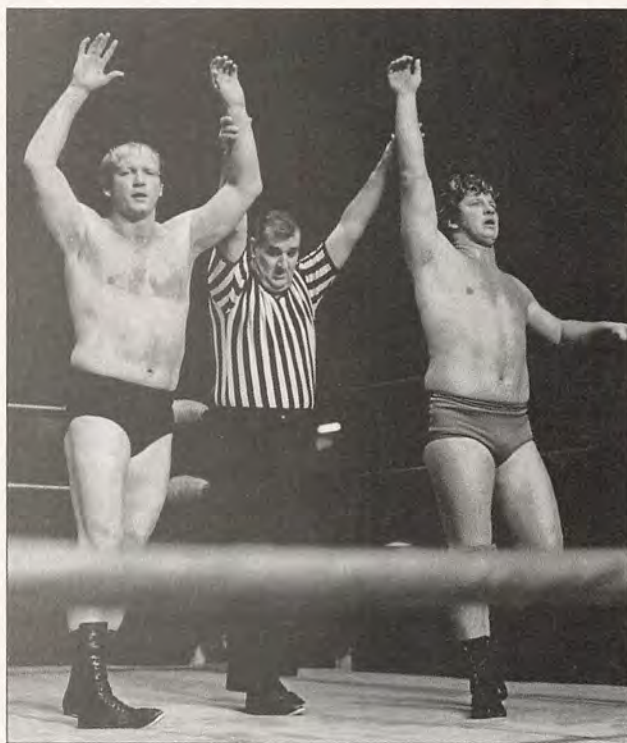
A: It was a repeat of my first match in Amarillo, Texas, against Don Fargo. I did feel pressure to perform against the man my father trained, Gene Kiniski. And Kiniski was almost like a father figure to me. He gave me a lot of good advice. He saved my career in my early years up in Vancouver in 1963 and '64. I had a severe knee injury, and I was going to leave the territory to have surgery on the knee. Kiniski told me not to do that. He said, "I want you to show up tonight, I want you to shave your leg, get some long tights, and I'm going to tape up your knee so you can wrestle tonight." Sure enough, I walked away from the surgery, and for a solid week, Kiniski would get there an hour ahead of time with me and taped my knee every night. I had to sneak in the back door of the arenas because I didn't



POLYMER LETTERS

Q: Is there a reason why the title change went down in Tampa? I suppose you and your father might have wanted it to happen in Amarillo.





Dory and kid brother Terry have their arms raised after besting Shohei Baba and Seiji Sakaguchi in Los Angeles in 1972. The brothers would go on to hold the NWA World tag team title, plus a long list of regional titles world over.



Regarded by many as the greatest head-to-head rivalry in the sport's history, Dory Jr. and Jack Brisco wrestled each other countless times, as both champion and challenger. Despite the intensity of these battles (which often included Terry Funk and Jerry Brisco), the two men had great respect for one another.

Kiniski for his annual show to coincide with the Gasparilla Festival. Eddie Graham was a longtime friend of my father's too, from way back. The decision didn't really involve me, but was between Graham and Sam Muchnick, the NWA president. Together, they decided Tampa should be the place.

Q: Your father clearly wanted you to establish your credibility before you became a wrestler. How did he want you to craft your image once you were champion? I get the feeling you were promoted as an all-American boy. In this magazine, *THE WRESTLER*, there was a famous headline from the period that goes, "The Champ's Message To The World's Youth: Go Take A Bath And Get A Haircut!" (November 1969).

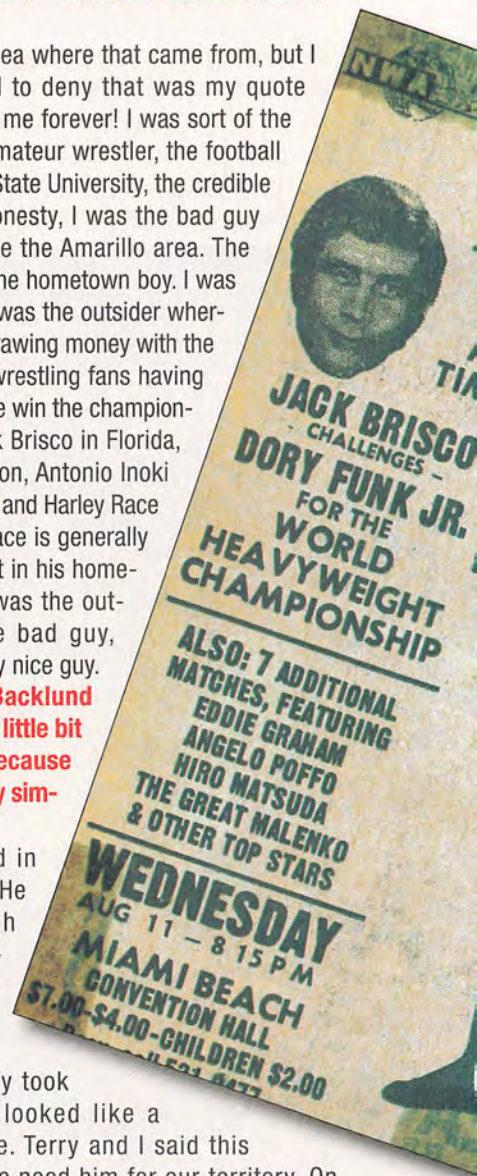
A: [Laughs] I have some idea where that came from, but I never said that. I need to deny that was my quote because it has followed me forever! I was sort of the all-American boy, the amateur wrestler, the football player from West Texas State University, the credible athlete ... but, in all honesty, I was the bad guy whenever I went outside the Amarillo area. The good guy's going to be the hometown boy. I was traveling the world, so I was the outsider wherever I went. The key to drawing money with the championship was the wrestling fans having a hero they wanted to see win the championship. The hero was Jack Brisco in Florida, John Valentine in Houston, Antonio Inoki and Giant Baba in Japan, and Harley Race in Kansas City. Harley Race is generally known as a heel, but not in his hometown of Kansas City. I was the outsider. I was often the bad guy, although I'm really a very nice guy.

Q: I have a feeling Bob Backlund might have borrowed a little bit from your playbook, because his promos seemed very similar to yours.

A: Bob Backlund learned in the Amarillo territory. He was an underneath wrestler out of Oklahoma. He came to Amarillo for a television appearance only.

And, my gosh, this guy took off his shirt and he looked like a super-fabulous athlete. Terry and I said this guy's not a jobber—we need him for our territory. On that day, we talked to him about coming to the Amarillo territory and that's where he began his professional wrestling career as a main-eventer.

Q: Back when you were champion, where did you make the most money? What territory was considered the top where you could make a good payday?



"A lot of kids playing football at the time happened to be big, strong athletes, and they went into the business because of Dory Funk Sr.'s influence and the general respect for professional wrestling he created in the Amarillo area."

A: All you have to do is pull out the ol' inflation calculator to find out. I'd say St. Louis, Houston, Japan, Florida, Detroit, percentage-wise, Don Owen in Portland, Oregon, Frank Tunney in Toronto, Mike LeBell in Los Angeles, Ed Francis in Hawaii, Eddie Graham in Florida, Nick Gulas in Tennessee, and Bob Geigel in Kansas City.

Q: This may be tough because you were champion for so long, but who were your best opponents during that period?

A: You know, I can answer that question easily. I would say Wahoo, Valentine, Brisco, and Race. I worked with The Sheik twice for sellouts at Cobo Hall. I could go on and on.

Q: It sounds as if you liked all the hard-hitters.

A: Oh, yeah. But it was all the way from those superstars in the big cities to Tennessee working with Whitey Caldwell.

Maybe that's a name you've never heard of.

Q: Never heard of him. Whitey Caldwell?

A: He was about 180 pounds. I walked in the dressing room in Birmingham. All the wrestlers were there, and I asked who I'd be working with that night. Remember, I used to work every night with a different challenger, lots of times in a different territory. So keeping up with who I was working with every night was like getting out of wrestling and getting back into it every day. They said, "You're working with Whitey over there." I looked over there and it was this kid who weighed about 180

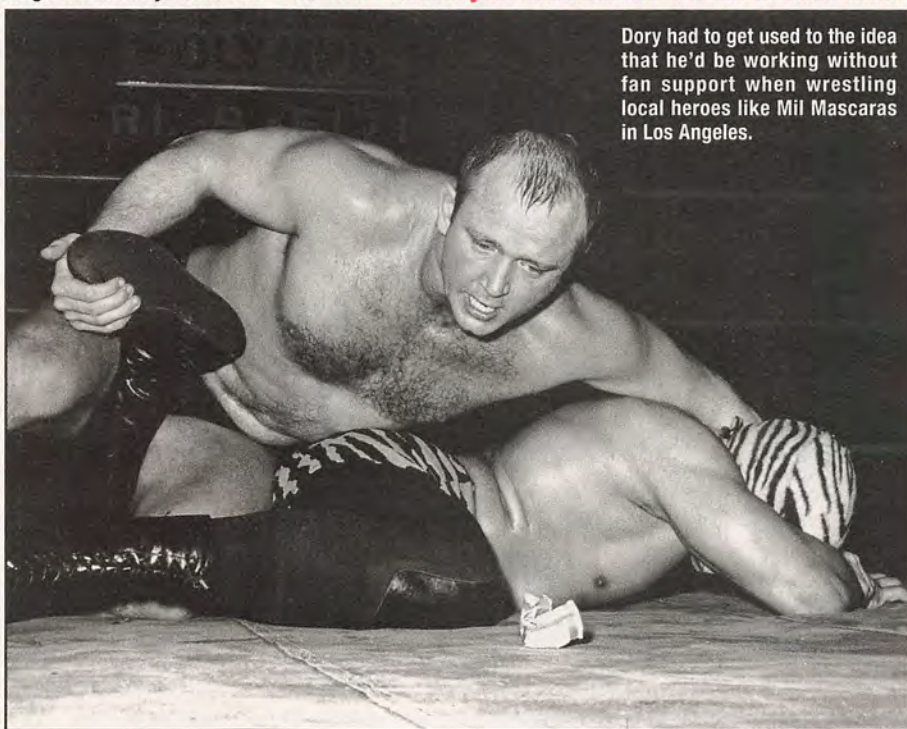


pounds. I figured those guys were ribbing me, but I always had a way of not letting anybody know I'd been had. So I put on my gear without knowing who I was wrestling. Sure enough, the bell rang and I walked out, and Whitey Caldwell walked into the ring. There, in Birmingham, Alabama, Whitey Caldwell and I wrestled to a one-hour draw. I came back a couple of months later and worked with him again in Birmingham—and we turned people away. It was a thrill to do things like that.

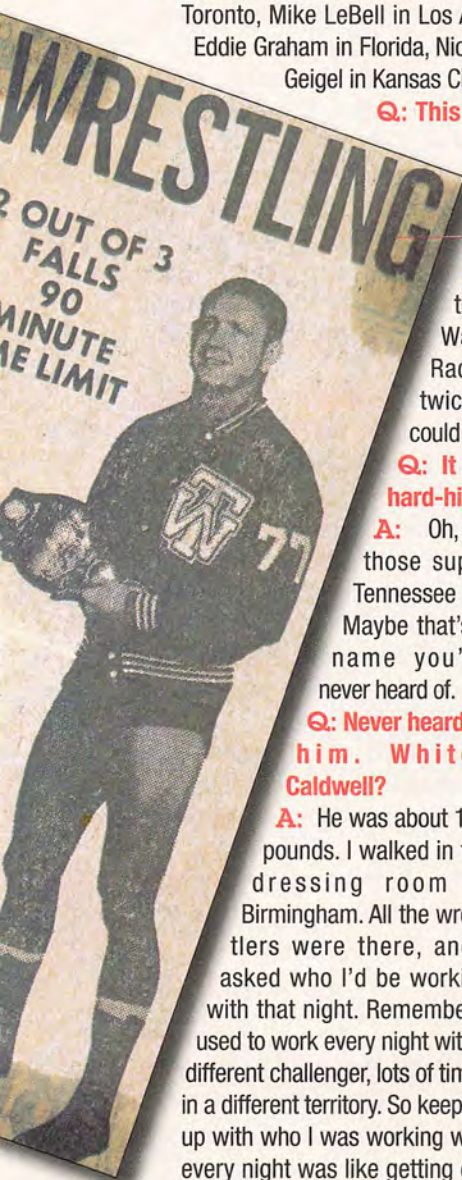
Q: I never realized a guy named Whitey Caldwell wrestled the World champion to a draw. That's terrific.

A: I wrestled the hour with so many people so many times.

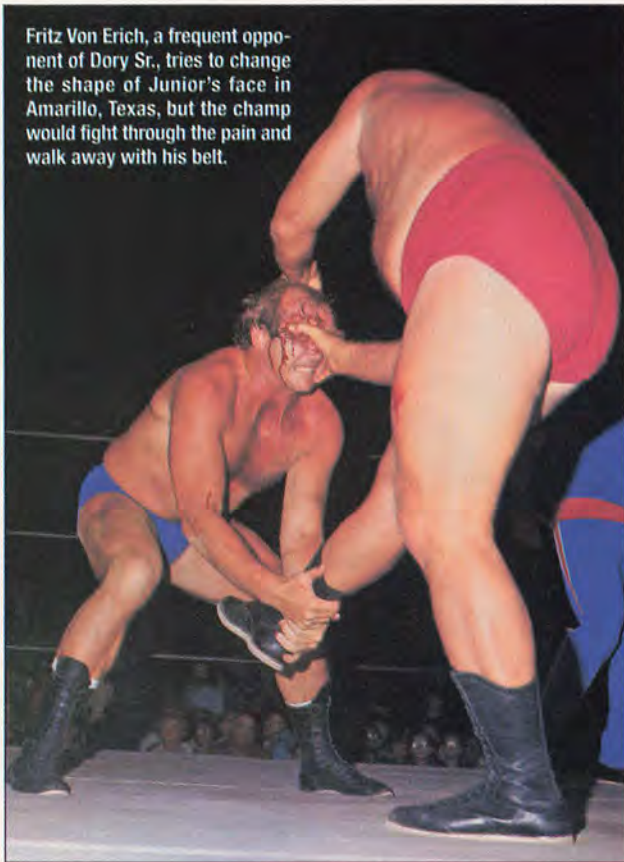
Q: Were most of your title defenses two-out-of-three-falls?



Dory had to get used to the idea that he'd be working without fan support when wrestling local heroes like Mil Mascaras in Los Angeles.



Fritz Von Erich, a frequent opponent of Dory Sr., tries to change the shape of Junior's face in Amarillo, Texas, but the champ would fight through the pain and walk away with his belt.



A: There was a time in professional wrestling when every main event was a two-out-of-three-fall match. By the time I was champion, more of them were one-fall matches than two-out-of-three-falls. It got so they wanted to sell more action to the people, and the fact that a match could be over in



Dory permitted *THE WRESTLER* to take these exclusive photos in February 1973 at the Neblett Hospital and Clinic in Canyon, Texas, after being involved in an accident with his pickup truck on his father's ranch.

three seconds at any time did just that.

Q: What was a typical workweek like? How many title defenses did you make per week or per year?

A: Six per week for over 4½ years. I was supposed to be working three weeks on and four weeks off through my bookings with Sam Muchnick. But, of course, when I had my week off and went back to Amarillo, my father would steal bookings from me on my days off. So for 4½ years, all I saw were arenas and opponents in NWA World championship matches. There are two ways to look at it: I knew it was hard on my family, but at the same time, it provided my family with a very good life.

Q: When you were champion, did you make many title defenses against Jack Brisco or did most of those matches come later?

A: No, as NWA champion, I wrestled Jack Brisco at least a hundred times. I wrestled Jack in Japan, St. Louis, Florida, Amarillo, Dallas, all over the world. It began in Florida, where Eddie Graham used to book different matches for every town where he ran weekly. Florida was a very busy territory. It was Tampa, Orlando, Tallahassee, Miami, and the Bayfront in St. Pete. Because wrestling fans traveled from town to town, Eddie had to have a different card for each town. Eventually, they said the heck with it, and they booked Jack Brisco and me for every town.

Q: You mentioned his great amateur background. What other things made him such a great opponent?

A: Eddie Graham. Even before I was NWA World champion, he told Jack, "You're my choice for the territory to be built around, and we're going to make sure you get over. It's going to take a long time, in fact so long that at times you may think it's not going to really happen." But Jack, Eddie, and the Florida promotion worked very hard, and it did happen. The fans absolutely loved him. Jack Brisco's appeal wasn't only to the teenage market, with his long hair and good looks, but his appeal was geared toward all wrestling fans. There were little old ladies who loved Jack Brisco. But the promotion of Jack Brisco went out through Championship Wrestling From Florida to every market in the country.

Q: I want to ask you about something you're probably sick of talking about: your infamous truck accident. Of course, we have the photos of you recovering from the accident.

A: Yes, the famous ones of me in the hospital.

Q: Exactly. It looks like you're recovering from quite a jolt there. But the rumor persists that your father didn't want you to lose the title to Brisco directly and that the truck accident was contrived. Here's just one more opportunity to address that.

A: The water was cold as hell!! [Laughs] There was a half-inch of ice on top of the water and I was in the water inside the pickup truck freezing to death. Thank the Lord they got me out of there. I was taken to the hospital in Canyon, Texas. I'm sorry to have missed the shot. Everybody gets mad at me, but I'm the

"My dad never made it easy on Terry or me coming into the business. When he corrected us, it was in no uncertain terms in front of the wrestlers, telling us straight out if we were doing something wrong."

.....

one who was injured—not everyone else!

Q: I had heard that your father pulled you out of the truck. Is that true?

A: He didn't go too deep in the water. It was up to my neck! But, yeah, my father helped me out.

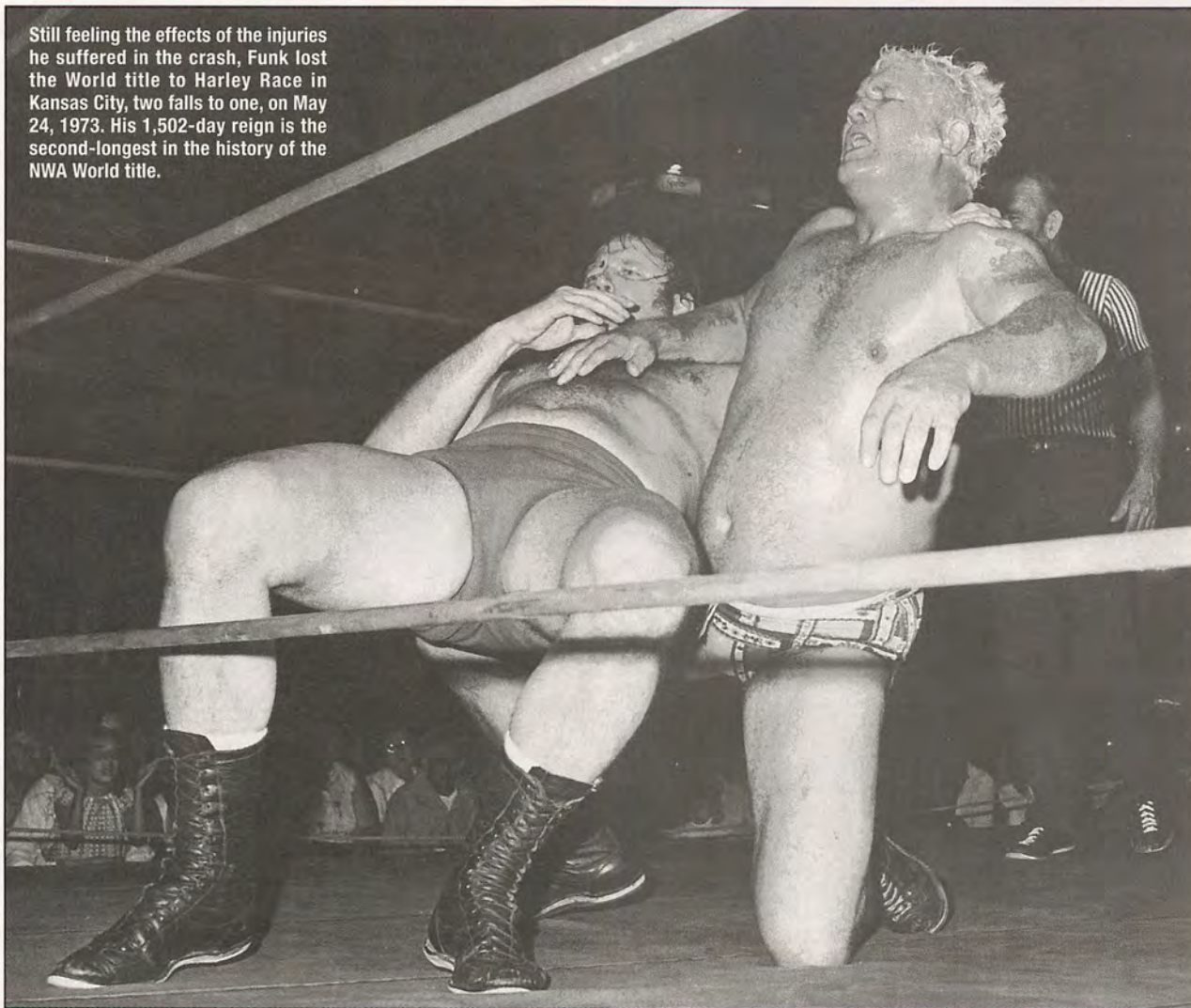
Q: It had to be a scary moment. Your father passed away at age 54 shortly after you lost the title, didn't he?

A: Very shortly, yes. He did not live to see Terry win the title. He would've been extremely proud of that.

Q: Terry told me that your father died shortly after having an impromptu wrestling match against Les Thornton at the family home. Is that true?



Still feeling the effects of the injuries he suffered in the crash, Funk lost the World title to Harley Race in Kansas City, two falls to one, on May 24, 1973. His 1,502-day reign is the second-longest in the history of the NWA World title.





Less than a month after this gorefest in Amarillo between challenger Funk and champion Brisco in November 1975, Terry Funk was able to snag the World title from Jack in Miami.



Dory found true happiness when he found Marti at a wrestling show in Tampa in 1980. The two pick out a record (above) and pick on Carlos Colon (right). Marti, Dory's second wife, is very protective of her man!

A: Les Thornton and Gordie Nelson, yeah.

Q: They just pushed the coffee table away and went at it?

A: My father didn't necessarily do that a lot, but that was not unusual in those days of professional wrestling. Sputnik Monroe would do it a little different: He'd strip down to his underwear and take on somebody. There are so many things I've thought over. Why did it happen? What was the situation? It really wasn't just a workout. It was the pride of everything that my father was, with his family there, and all of a sudden being asked to go from a very sedate situation without warm-up to 100 miles an hour. *Wham and zoom*, it was too much for his heart.

Q: So you think the impromptu match did have a direct impact on him.

A: Yes, the heart attack did take place at that time. I didn't know it. He actually got up and kind of laughed and shook hands with Gordie and Les. He actually looked at Gordie and said, "We're getting too old to be doing this." So I left the room. It was only a few minutes later that someone came to me and said Terry had left the house with my father and was on the way to the hospital in Canyon, Texas. I was driving my car 100 miles an hour to Canyon. When I got there, my father was on the hospital bed talking to the doctor, as calm as I am right now. Things were so slow in those days. They did an EKG on him. The doctor said, "Dory, you've had a massive heart attack and we've got to get you to Amarillo." Now we're already at least 30 minutes into the incident. By ambulance, it was another 25 minutes to Amarillo. It was too much time wasted. He passed away just before we got to Amarillo.

Q: Your brother said something to me that has always stuck with me. Terry said that his father had died when he was 54 and that he often thinks of all the sunsets he has seen since age 54.

A: I think of the same thing all the time. That was so long ago, and here I am and still here. I'm so many years older than my father.

Q: After traveling around the world for four years, your truck



"For 4½ years, all I saw were arenas and opponents in NWA World championship matches. There are two ways to look at it: I knew it was hard on my family, but at the same time, it provided my family with a very good life."

accident, and the death of your father, did you take a break from wrestling for a while?

A: There was no break. My father, Terry, and I were running the Amarillo territory. That happened on a Saturday night. On Sunday night, our dear friend who passed away, Ricky Romero, took care of everything in Albuquerque. We had to be in El Paso on Monday night and then Odessa and Lubbock. Then we were off for the funeral and back to work the next day. We were the family that owned and operated the territory, so it didn't work without us.

Q: Now we're familiar with the 10-bell salutes on television. What was the reaction of the fans when you did those shows after his death? It had to come as a shock to them.

A: Yeah, it was a shock. It was very hard on the fans. Terry and I just had to keep ourselves going even though it was very, very heavy on our minds. We still did our matches, did our job, ran the towns—everything continued. We talked it over and felt it was what our father would've wanted.

Q: Throughout the rest of the decade of the '70s, how much time did you spend dealing with the Amarillo territory as a business, compared to the appearances you continued to make around the world? You and Terry wrestled in Japan together, for example. How did you balance the two?

A: Just run and go. I've been immersed in professional wrestling all my life. We were not only running the Amarillo terri-



tory, but we were bookers for All-Japan Pro Wrestling, we were wrestling for All-Japan Pro Wrestling, and still doing our own territory. Terry became NWA World champion, remained champion for more than a year, and we kept the territory going at the same time and all the way through the end of the decade, at which time we sold out to Dick Murdoch and Blackjack Mulligan.

Q: I know you wrestled Terry at least once in Japan. It was such big news that it made the cover of *THE WRESTLER* (October 1981). Is that the only time you wrestled him?

A: I did wrestle him in Japan, and I've apologized to Terry sincerely because I won that match. We were both trained by the same person, even though he has his style and I have my

At age 41, Dory could still mix it up with the roughest men in the business, including Bruiser Brody



Though there wasn't much of a sibling rivalry between Dory and Terry, they did feud briefly in 1984, with no lasting effects.



Funk teaches a young Rob Van Dam some of the same lessons he learned from the masters when he was starting out. Throughout the history of professional wrestling, it's that cycle that has helped establish generation after generation of greats.



Dory and Tommy Dreamer cut Terry from barbed wire in the summer of 1994. ECW was just tough enough for The Funk Brothers.

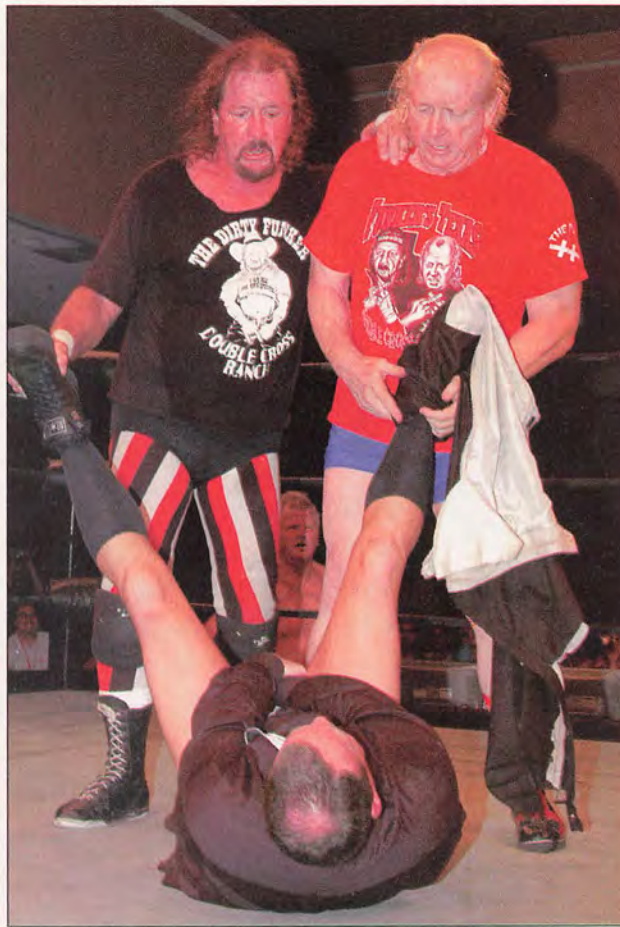
style. It was very much like wrestling myself. I also wrestled him in a very interesting tag team match in Amarillo. I was Ricky Romero's partner and Terry was Wahoo McDaniel's partner. Those were the only times.

Q: When I think of Dory Funk Jr., I think of a few trademarks. I think of the spinning toe hold, a submission hold that is sorely missed today, the sleeper hold, and those looping European uppercuts. When did you start using those uppercuts and who inspired you to use them?

A: Kurt Von Brauner in the Amarillo territory. You may remember Saul Weingeroff and The Von Brauners. He was from Germany, and he was the first to show me the European uppercut. Then I encountered the move again in Calgary, Canada, where Billy Robinson was using it extensively. Between the two, I developed my own style. It's different from the basic European uppercut or anything else you've seen. It came from practice, practice, practice. It took four years to develop it. Still today, when I go to enter a restaurant, I'll release the latch by giving it that little pop. I just had to learn how to throw it solid and throw it flat—and it's not easy.

Q: It seemed like one of the more credible striking moves in wrestling, definitely.

A: I feel that way. When I was a kid watching wrestling in Amarillo, there was Gus Johnson. All of a sudden, he'd get



Terry and Dory de-pants Jim Cornette at WrestleReunion 2 in 1995. The brothers always have a blast when they get together. Cornette? Not so much.

[Dory Sr.'s death] was a shock. It was very hard on the fans. Terry and I just had to keep ourselves going even though it was very, very heavy on our minds. We still did our matches, did our job, ran the towns—everything continued."

mad and instead of throwing a punch, he'd throw a forearm and the people would go crazy. The spinning toe hold came from Walter Palmer in the days of wrestling at the International Amphitheatre in Chicago. He passed it to my father, Dory Funk Sr., who passed it to me.

Q: With so many submission holds, the person applying the hold is in a passive, almost rested, state. What I like about the spinning toe hold is you see the wrestler applying the pressure by going around and around.

A: The spinning toe hold is an action move. The reason everybody doesn't do it is because everybody doesn't know the secret. I know the secret. I'm just not allowed to reveal that right now. But it's also very simple. Okay?

Q: Okay. You never seemed to be a cheater in the ring. You were scientifically based. But the fans booed you because you made money deals with the wrong people and was seen as a mercenary. Did you like being a heel?

A: The reason is that I wrestled the hometown hero every time. The wrestling fans would make up anything because they wanted to be mad at me. Brisco, Valentine, Race, Whitey Caldwell, Rufus R. Jones, Giant Baba, Antonio Inoki ... it was always the outsider vs. the hometown hero.



Q: I distinctly remember your feud with Rufus R. "Freight Train" Jones. That certainly was a clash of styles.

A: Oh, sure. Bearcat Brown, if you've ever heard of him, had much the same style as Rufus R. Jones. I did great business with Brown in Nick Gulas' territory. I had the opportunity to wrestle Lou Thesz in Memphis, Tennessee, when I was NWA champion. I also wrestled him in St. Louis and Amarillo as the challenger.

Q: Of course, you made a run as "Hoss" Funk in the WWF. I know you're a showman at heart, but did you have any qualms about how the WWF was treating pro wrestling?



In 1997, the WWF asked Dory to come to Stamford 10 days a month to train its wrestlers. Assisted by Pat Patterson, Dory gives some tips to Mark Henry and Edge. Dory and Marti opened their own training center in Ocala, Florida, The Funking Conservatory, in 1999, which churns out would-be stars to this day.



In one of their proudest moments, Dory and Terry are inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame together in 2009 (top). Dory obviously doesn't play favorites, appearing at TNA's Lockdown 2010 along with fellow legends Baron Von Raschke and Bobby Heenan (above).

A: I had an absolute great time working for the WWF. When I was in high school, my coach used to call me "Hoss." That was no problem. I know all the ins and outs of trademarking and what has to be done in the wrestling business. My time in the WWF was a terrific experience.

Q: How did Jesse Barr become Jimmy Jack Funk, the lost Funk brother?

A: Jesse Barr originally came to the Florida territory while I was booking there. He was an amateur wrestler and excellent performer. Anyway, I was teaming with my brother in the WWF. We were in WrestleMania II and went on NBC television together. It was unbelievable. But for reasons I'm not certain of, but personal reasons I'm sure, Terry went home. We had to find a

replacement quickly. That was Jimmy Jack.

Q: A while ago, you named all the wrestling capitals where you made money and looked forward to defending the title. Conspicuous by its absence was Puerto Rico. Is there a reason for that?

A: No, I should've mentioned Puerto Rico. I was WWC champion there. I worked in Puerto Rico before Carlos Colon came along, against Jack Brisco, and several other opponents. I worked a one-hour Broadway with Jack in San Juan. I had met Carlos Colon when he was first beginning in professional wrestling in Calgary. We became friends there, and I had a super time working for Carlos in Puerto Rico. It was like a vacation for Marti and me. We liked the food and the atmosphere. Wrestling was tremendous business there. There was the Hiram Bithorn Stadium, for example, a baseball stadium that drew 17,000 people. When we went there, we'd rent a car and drive all over the island. We had a great time, and, like most of our vacations, it was a wrestling vacation.

Q: When you were there with your brother, were you afraid he would say something on the microphone that would get you massacred?

A: My brother and I faced The Road Warriors in San Juan, Puerto Rico. My brother was such a terror, and had so much heat going with the fans that he actually got upset and started to walk out. The fans went nuts. My brother angered security, and security walked out of the arena! So we had to go in the ring and face The Road Warriors in this environment. Because there were so many ringside seats throughout this baseball stadium, the ring was up on a platform. There were ledges along three sides of it, but we didn't realize there was no ledge along the back. Terry and I went into the ring, waiting for The Road Warriors. They hit the ring with their music. Terry scooted out over the backside of the ring and went eight feet down! He just disappeared. He crawled back into the ring and his words were, "Dory, you've got to work this match. My back is killing me." So two angry Road Warriors were there and 17,000 screaming, yelling people were cheering for The Road Warriors. We've been bad guys a lot of places.

Q: I realize you've been involved in training throughout your career, but I recall that the WWF leaned on you rather heavily to train its future stars in the late-1990s.

A: Yes, that was 1998-99. The WWF asked me to create a program. That's when we created the Funking Dojo up there. Kurt Angle, Christian, Edge, Test, The Hardy Boyz, and Mark Henry all came through that program.

Q: How did you come up with the Funking Conservatory name?

A: Marti and I together. After spending a year-and-a-half training wrestlers in Stamford, Connecticut, I decided to open my own wrestling school. We were living in Florida, and Ocala is a beautiful place to live. Marti is my videographer here at the Funking Conservatory Wrestling School. Our Bang TV show is all produced by Marti and me. We have 120 videos on our website. We think television is the most important thing a wrestler needs to know other than in-ring performance.

.....

A: Oh, yes [laughs]. There may be words about that, but Brett



A: You'd probably see the greatest mat wrestling match in the history of professional wrestling ... just as long as Terry would listen to me!



■ ■ ■ [THE WRESTLER]

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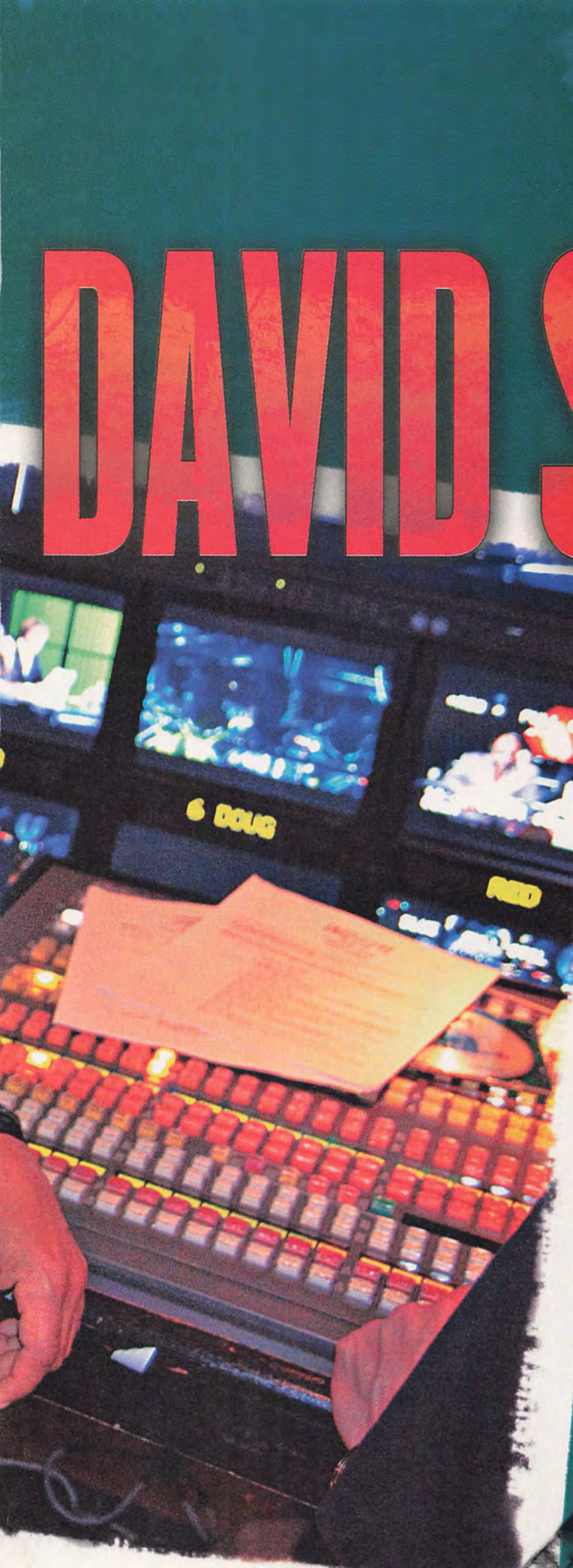
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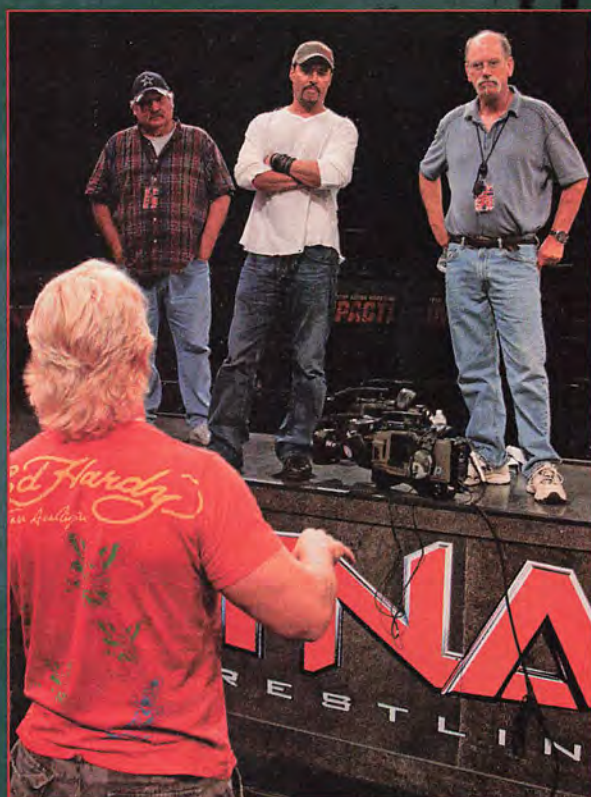
DAVID SAHADI

You Won't See His
Name In The Ratings,
But He's One Of
TNA's Biggest Stars

By Darren Wood
Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

IF YOU HAVE watched WWE or TNA programming in any capacity over the past 18 years, there is no doubt that you will have noticed the work of David Sahadi, even if you might not be familiar with the name.

From 1992 until 2003, Sahadi worked as WWE's creative director of on-air promotions, overseeing many of the PPV openings that became so iconic to the company's Attitude Era.



Sahadi, flanked by lighting director Nick Woolfolk (left) and producer Keith Mitchell, discusses lighting and pyro cues with Jeff Jarrett.

Era. Who can forget the 1999 Super Bowl advert filmed at the WWE's headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, the SummerSlam 1998 PPV opening with "Stone-Cold Steve" Austin walking coolly and confidently down a street lined with vandals, cars on fire, and explosions happening all round him, or the WrestleMania 15 "Legends" video featuring Pat Patterson, Gorilla Monsoon, Ernie Ladd, Killer Kowalski, and Freddie Blassie that reportedly brought Vince McMahon to tears?

Working behind the scenes, the Emmy Award-winning Sahadi, now 49, has had as much of an impact on this industry as just about any man who ever stepped in front of the camera.

Sahadi earned a degree in mathematics from Manhattanville College and quickly came to the realization that a life of numbers would not be very fulfilling. With the help of his father, former wrestling magazine publisher Lou Sahadi, he secured a job at NBC Sports as a production assistant. Just after the summer of 1992, while working as manager of on-air promotions, he was approached by John Filippelli, WWE's executive producer. Filippelli believed the company's on-air

promos needed a bold, fresh look and that Sahadi was the man for the job.

"I was scared to death coming into the company," Sahadi recalls. "One of my first jobs was to create the openings for *Raw* and *Mania*. I had never produced a show opening before. Less than two weeks into my tenure, Filippelli was fired and replaced by Kevin Dunn. 'I didn't know Dunn all that well at the time and I felt that if I didn't deliver on these show openings, then I would soon be history.'"

But for all his inward trepidation, Sahadi had a bold vision and the know-how to make it work.

"Video production of

professional wrestling was living in the past. I wanted to introduce the current trends of the day," he said. "I grew up in the MTV era, so I wanted to make things more cutting-edge by introducing faster and aggressive cutting, video treatments, and the use of multiple layers."

Sahadi began producing pay-per-view montages that recapped the current storylines, and, with WWE starting to push the envelope, Sahadi was given more and more freedom. "WWE embraced an attitude that encouraged creativity," he said. "I had free rein to pretty much do whatever I wanted to do. I was able to take risks without fear of failure."

"Kevin Dunn allowed me to shoot high-end image spots on film without even running the creative by him. That is how much confidence he had in me. This confidence allowed me to push beyond my own limits and do some really fun and different spots."

Having the confidence of Dunn was one thing; the videos still had to be run past the company chairman.

"Playing them for Vince McMahon the very first time without him being aware of what the spots were, then getting a

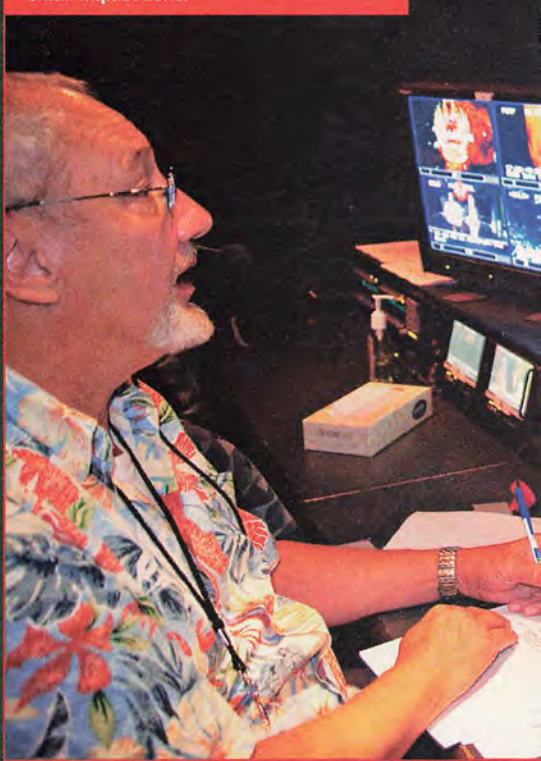
positive reaction from him was one of the greatest rewards while working there. It was very fulfilling to please the Ultimate Boss," Sahadi said. "Vince taught me a very important lesson my first day on the job. He said, 'What we do here is all about one thing: emotion.' I'll never forget that. He was talking about the wrestling business in general. I applied that theory to whatever I produced. Whether a promo or an opening makes one laugh, or think, or feel is what I try to do. I strive to evoke emotion out of the viewer."

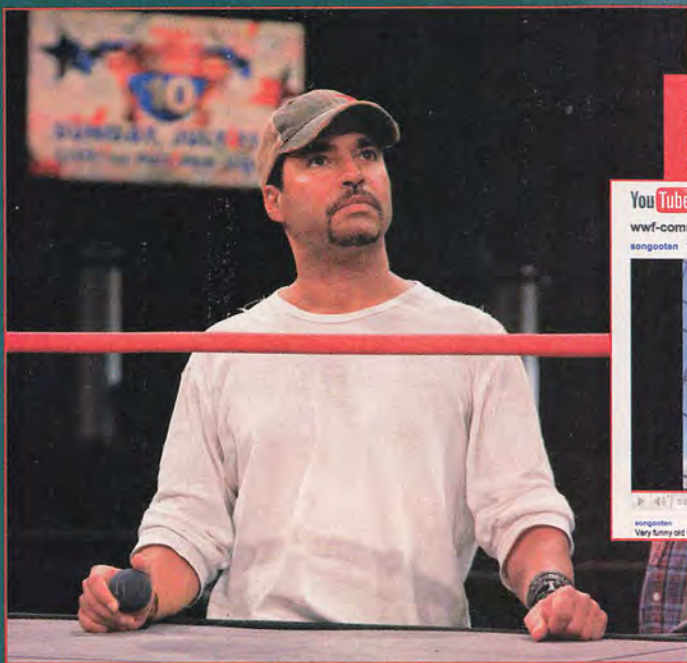
Sahadi said he was in McMahon's and Dunn's inner circle and was consulted on nearly every strategic decision the company made. He had a tremendous and extensive film budget to work with in WWE. He wrote, directed, and produced more than 300 film spots.

"My inspiration comes from all sorts of places," he said. "Sometimes I will be inspired by an image I see on TV, a line I hear in a song, or some random thought that pops in my head while I'm hiking or driving."

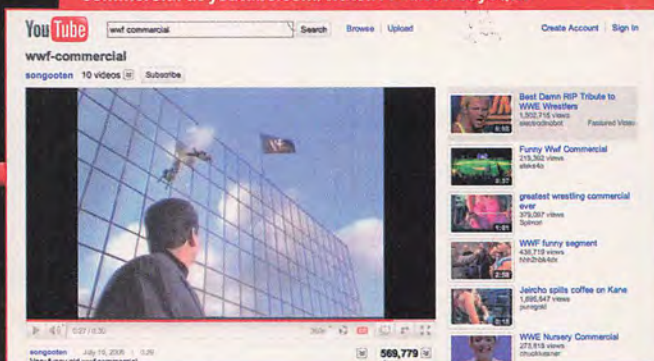
"Most directors do storyboards. Mine are in my head, especially when it

Assistant director "Rocket" Richard Fansher gets implicit instructions regarding video screen cues from Sahadi. Dave and his team give TNA TV its big-time feel, despite working from the relatively small Impact Zone.





Deep in thought, Sahadi never knows where his next creative idea will come from. Ideas come to Sahadi in very untraditional ways. If "untraditional" is your thing, check out the WWE Super Bowl commercial at youtube.com/watch?v=zNCwb5yoQtw



comes to a film shoot, I drove one of my film producers crazy at WWE because he always wanted storyboards a week in advance for his production book. I'm a very visceral person; I need to feel it. When I write a spot, I have visuals in my head. I never want to do storyboards until a day or two before a shoot, because

That's when I get inspiration for certain shots that I might not have initially boarded. Photos of a location aren't enough for me. I have to be standing there, walking the location, open to whatever is calling, whatever images are begging to come out."

Sahadi left WWE after more than 10 years and had no plans to go to another wrestling company—until he spoke with Jeff Jarrett in 2004 and took up the challenge of plying his trade in TNA. At the time, the Nashville-based company had been in existence for two years and the production values of its TV show were relatively primitive.

Back in November 2004, with its first monthly PPV, *Victory Road*, fast approaching, Sahadi was brought on board initially as a three-month consultant. Three months has turned into six years and Sahadi still produces the monthly PPV openings as well as writing image campaigns and directing film shoots.

While TNA's production values were raised to a new level under Sahadi, the production facilities themselves took a bit of getting used to. While WWE's equipment was state of the art, TNA didn't even

have an edit room when Sahadi came on board. Video packages were cut on laptop computers.

"To be honest, it was quite humbling," he recalled. "But at the same time, the challenge fuelled my passions. I began working within the set parameters, then expanding them. After all, the most powerful production tool isn't a great video effect, but a great thought. Now at TNA we have our own state-of-the-art production studio in Nashville."

Sahadi's role within the company has expanded over time. In addition to being responsible for the same duties that he had in WWE, he also directs the live and taped broadcasts and supervises the edit sessions of the show, along with Andrew Thomas.

For Sahadi, perhaps more than most TNA employees and wrestlers, *Impact's* shift to Monday nights opposite *Raw* was a highly personalized piece of the company's developing history. The fact that the plan was quickly aborted does not change what he feels is still a bright future for the company.

"Obviously, I was disappointed in the ratings," he said, "but I'm proud of everyone who has worked so hard and with so much heart. There is a buzz around TNA at the moment, especially for those of us who have been here since the early years. It's heartening to see the continual growth; it's exciting to embrace the potential.

"The ratings will eventually come. It's a process. To use a worn-out cliché, Rome wasn't built in a day. But I fully believe the sky is the limit for TNA." □





Had this occurred more times over the past year, the word retirement may never have crossed Batista's lips. Frustration over his inability to be WWE's main man was largely responsible for his departure.

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BATISTA'S RETIREMENT

FOR NOW OR FOREVER?

AFTER FOUR WORLD TITLES, TWO WWE TITLES, THREE WORLD TAG TEAM TITLES, ONE WWE TAG TEAM TITLE, ONE ROYAL RUMBLE VICTORY, ONE *PWI* WRESTLER OF THE YEAR AWARD, AND ONE YEAR ATOP THE "*PWI* 500," BATISTA'S CAREER HAS COME TO A WHIMPERING END ... OR (PROBABLY) NOT

BY DAVE LENKER

JUST WHEN YOU think you have this wrestling retirement thing figured out, well, you don't. The typical visceral reaction to Dave Batista whining and complaining his retirement to WWE fans live on TV this spring—technically, he said that he had quit WWE—had to have been a collective "Yeah, right ... he'll be back by ..."

As intense as Batista is (was?) in the ring, he is equally as intense in the gym. His buddy Manny Pacquiao has less trouble finding sparring partners!

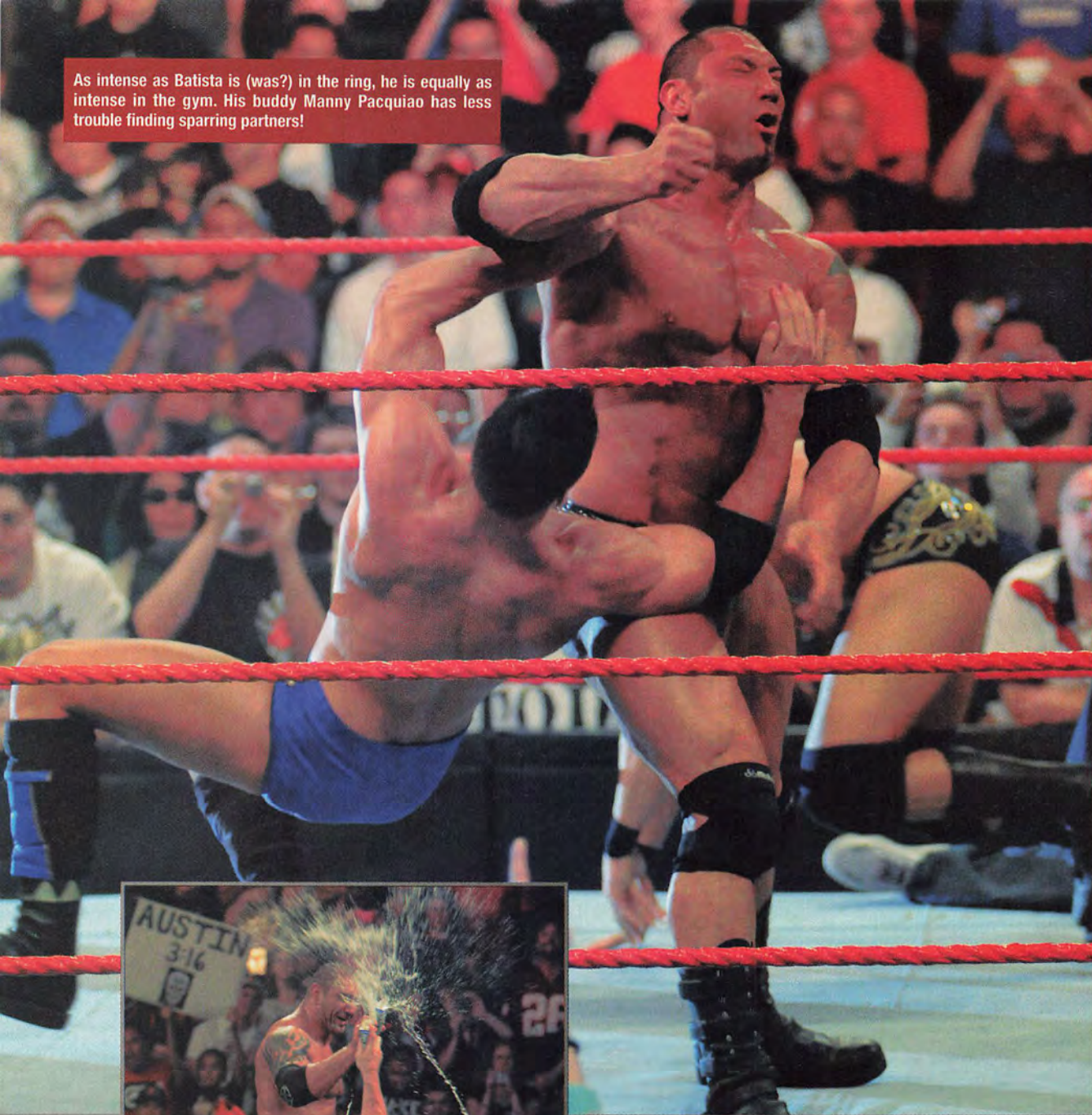


Photo by George Napolitano



Photo by George Napolitano

Batista and Steve Austin share a toast at Cyber Sunday 2009. Austin is one of the few major stars in recent history to make a clean break from active competition. Of course, he was forced out by injury; Batista left of his own volition.

And, yeah, you might end up being right.

But show us your Ric Flairs and Terry Funks and Mick Foleys and we'll raise you a few Steve Austins, Rocks, and JBLs. Not so clear-cut after all, is it?

Unlike say, Flair and Funk, however, Batista actually has a non-wrestling agenda to pursue in "retirement" (*see sidebar*). Also unlike those two and even Foley, Batista got into this game later than most and isn't what you would call a wrestling lifer. We can see him being prepared for life after wrestling. However, to swing the discussion back the other way, that doesn't mean at the not-exactly-advanced-for-a-professional-wrestler age of 41, that he has closed the door tightly on the

career that made him famous just yet. Not at all.

In fact, we would call it 75/25 that he returns in a full-time capacity. It just might take a little while for him to find his way home.

One major detail has us leaning in that direction.

You see, rumors of Batista possibly leaving WWE have been floating since at least the beginning of 2010, as his contract was on the verge of expiring and he had talked early last year about walking away when his deal was up. He was widely expected to be gone immediately after he lost a second straight pay-per-view match to John Cena at Extreme Rules in April. A month earlier, he had dropped the WWE championship by submission to Cena at WrestleMania 26. This time, it was a humiliating defeat in a Last-Man-Standing match in which Cena didn't so much pummel him to the point at which he couldn't regain his feet, but rather outfoxed him, as he duct-taped him around a ringpost, a predicament that, oddly enough, is less than conducive to regaining one's vertical base.

Batista, however, played the good company man and returned for yet one more shot at Cena, and one more round of humiliation that WWE fans enjoyed so, this time getting trounced in an "I Quit" match at Over the Limit.

He quit against Cena, then officially quit the company for all to see 24 hours later on *Raw*.

Consider for a moment that in recent years Batista has never dodged controversy outside the ring. He scrapped with Booker T backstage five years back and didn't exactly go out of his way to apologize later. He also angered AJ Styles, among others, with his criticism of TNA and that company's "car wreck matches" in a newspaper interview. Even worse, while a member of the *Raw* roster a few years ago, he ripped the Smackdown roster, slamming a number of those wrestlers (without naming names) for what he called laziness and lack of pride, dedication, and passion. He admitted to being

OKAY... NOW WHAT?

Let's see, is there much demand for ex-wrestlers who love vintage metal lunchboxes? Most likely not. It became one of the most unusual pastimes of "The Animal" a few years ago. His favorite is a 1967 Green Hornet beauty with Bruce Lee on it. It's a nice hobby, but here are five other options. Just one surprise.

1. Mixed martial arts. This is the most likely option. In June, shortly after taking in a Strikeforce event in Los Angeles, big Dave told TMZ that he had signed with the MMA organization. Whoa, not so fast. Strikeforce shot that down pretty quickly. But you have to think there have been negotiations. At 41, it would be a longshot for him to make it big in MMA, maybe even at all. Then again, his old pal Brock Lesnar has done amazingly well in UFC, so he could put in a good word—or not. Said Lesnar of Batista at a recent press conference: "Get in line—everybody and their dog wants to get into fighting. Next question. We're talking about a heavyweight fight, not some wannabe." Doesn't sound like trash-talk, does it?

2. Hollywood. Batista has done quite a bit of the typical WWE guest star fare, appearing on *Family Feud*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Iron Chef America*, *MTV Cribs*, and so forth. He has also appeared in the movies *Wrong Side Of Town* (with RVD) and the upcoming *Wapakman*. Not exactly big budget stuff, but it's a start. There were even reports that he was miffed when WWE replaced him with Triple-H on an upcoming film. It's an option, but he might have to settle for appealing to those who like their movies that go straight to DVD.

3. Filipino flag-bearer. Batista is rightfully proud of his heritage. Wrestling fans who also enjoy the Sweet Science saw him accompany fellow Filipino Manny Pacquiao to the ring for his

2009 fight with Ricky Hatton, who once guest-hosted *Raw*. Batista isn't likely to pursue a boxing career, but Pacquiao likes having him around. They co-star together in *Wapakman* as well. Maybe the Filipino government could put him in charge of tourism.

4. Bodybuilding. It might not be as prestigious as it once was, but bodybuilding was his passion before he got into wrestling, and he credited it with saving his life after a rough childhood. He could do pretty well in an over-40 competition.

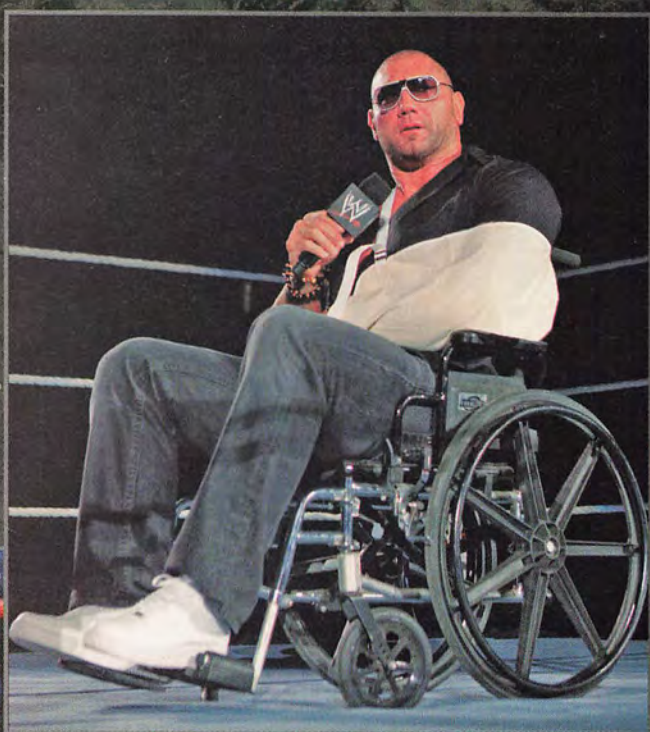
5. Full-time deacon. C'mon, he never really gave it a chance when he began carrying the collection plate and serving as bodyguard to Rev. D-Von Dudley as Deacon Batista upon debuting on WWE TV.

—Dave Lenker



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Ready for 40-and-over bodybuilding competition?



Batista has had more than his share of injuries over the past decade, but he has always had the determination to come back. Has that desire waned? That might well depend on how many other seven-figure opportunities he finds.

Cena has always tried to help Batista, like by lowering the top rope to make it easier for him to sail out of the ring. Actually, it would have been interesting to see Cena and Batista form a united front against the NXT invaders.

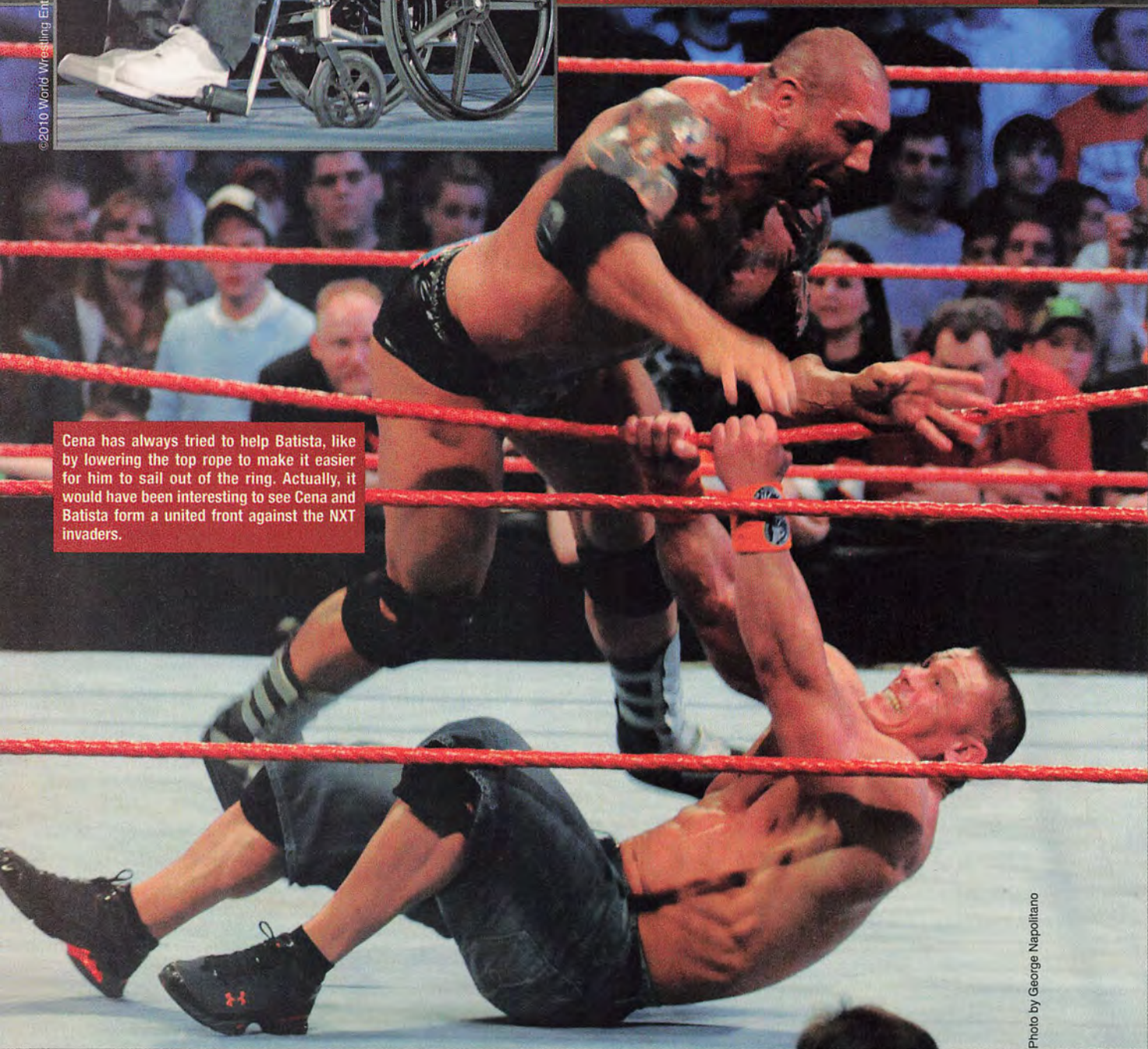
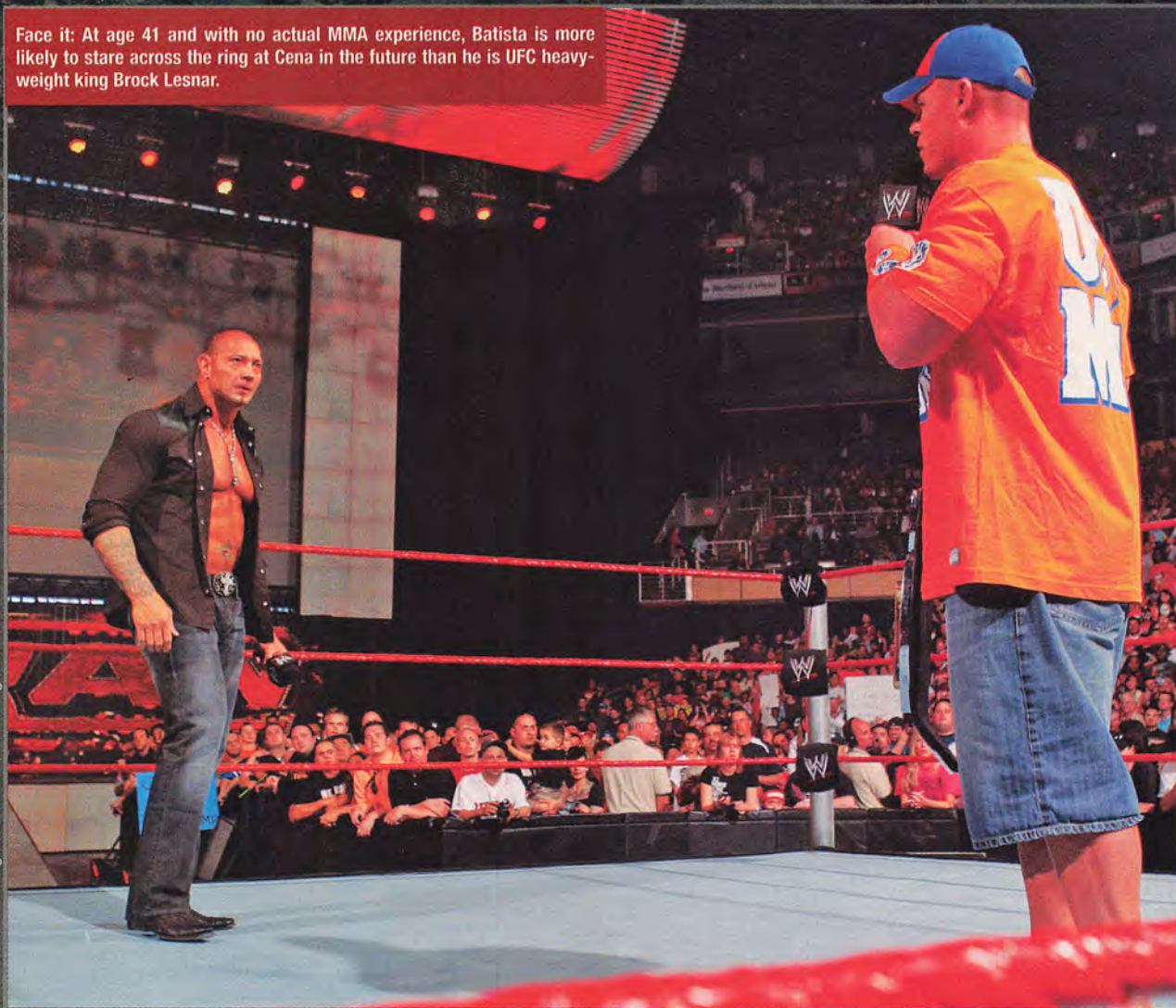


Photo by George Napolitano

Face it: At age 41 and with no actual MMA experience, Batista is more likely to stare across the ring at Cena in the future than he is UFC heavyweight king Brock Lesnar.



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lectured by Vince McMahon and The Undertaker for his excessively refreshing candor and reasoned that the comments were taken a bit out of context, but he nevertheless did continue to stand by them.

In penning his autobiography, *Batista Unleashed*, he fought hard but ultimately unsuccessfully to include quite a bit about Chris Benoit and his fondness for the man who, of course, murdered his wife and young son before committing suicide in 2007.

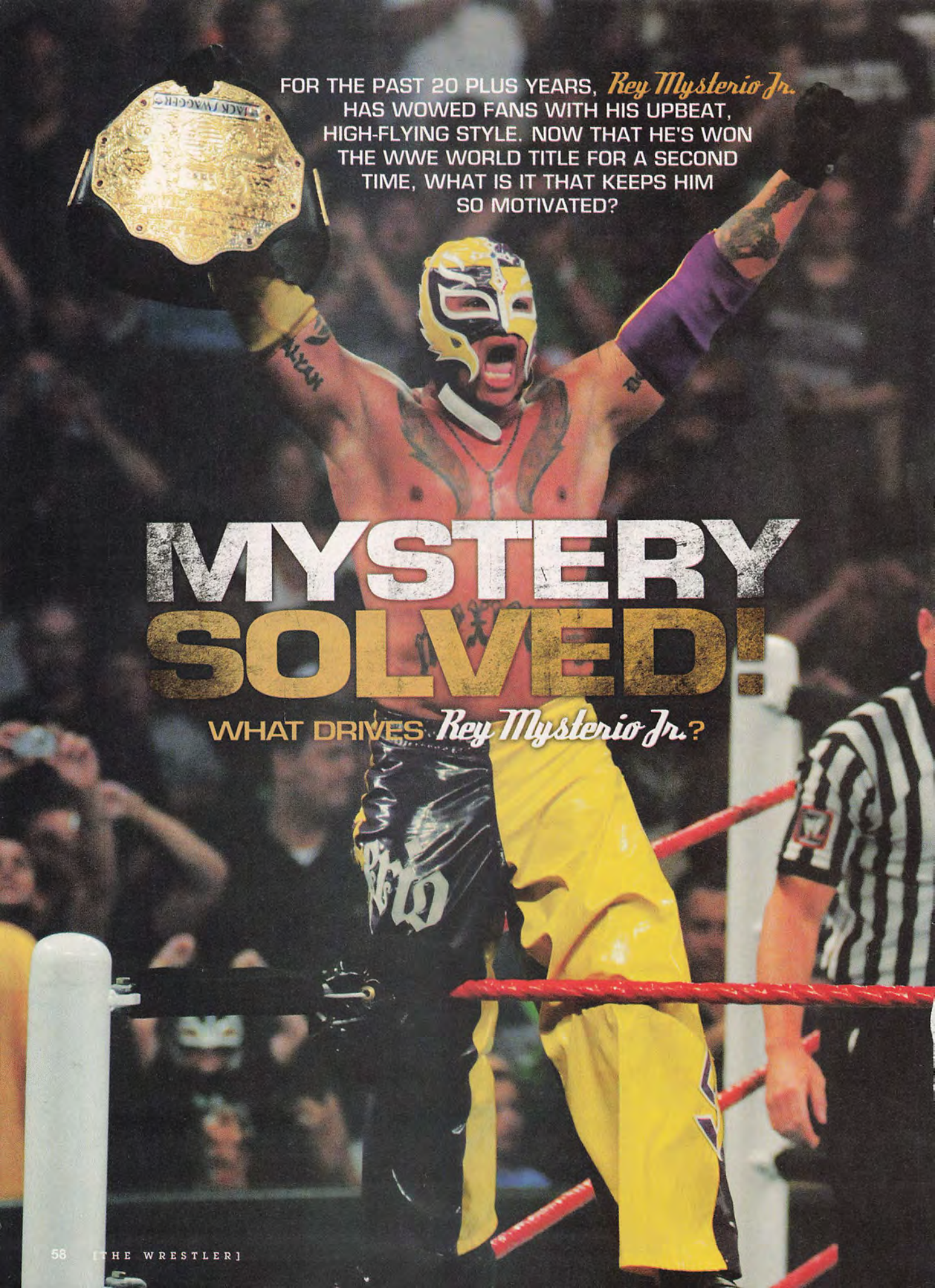
Point is, Batista can be a bit of a maverick—and an unapologetic one at that—but this time, he did the right thing. Our guess is that he did so not just for the extra PPV bonus check and to appease the boss, but also to set up his eventual return should he want to revisit the feud with Cena under different circumstances. He wanted fans to remember his departure, even it meant playing the cowardly fool.

Again, 41 is hardly old, but it's a curious age for a wrestler. With only about a decade worth of almost-nightly bumps on his body, he should still be relatively fresh physically. Then again, he has missed a lot of time during his WWE career due to major injuries. Torn triceps, biceps, hamstrings, and the like take their toll. And even the youngest of 41-year-olds would have hard time starting a career in another physically

grueling and demanding sport (see sidebar) at such an age. Forty-one is also a bit young to be spending too much time with friends and family (two adult daughters, two grandsons). And ask virtually anyone who has walked away from a career in the hottest and brightest of spotlights: Not having the adulation of millions anymore is a tough, tough adjustment.

"Even if you think you're ready to walk away and are looking forward to doing other things, like I definitely was, it feels so strange not to have that adrenaline fix anymore," said Trish Stratus, who had special mixed match on *Raw* last year and recently told *THE WRESTLER* that she would not rule out a more full-time comeback. "You can only get it from being out there in front of a live crowd of thousands, whether they really love you or really hate you. Stay as busy as you can, and it's a little easier. That's the way it was for me anyway."

Maybe, like Trish, it will take the right situation, perhaps a new and special kind of opponent to ultimately lure him back, but he will undoubtedly consider his other options and take at least some time to let a new life settle in. If he can hold out six months or a year, the longing to be back in front of rabid WWE crowds might just start to subside. Chances are, however, the decision to move his bio to the alumni section on www.wwe.com was a bit premature. □

A full-page photograph of Rey Mysterio Jr. in a wrestling ring, celebrating with his arms raised and holding the WWE World Title. He is wearing his signature yellow and black mask, a red singlet, and yellow and black pants. A referee in a black and white striped shirt is partially visible on the right. The background shows a blurred crowd of fans.

FOR THE PAST 20 PLUS YEARS, *Rey Mysterio Jr.*
HAS WOWED FANS WITH HIS UPBEAT,
HIGH-FLYING STYLE. NOW THAT HE'S WON
THE WWE WORLD TITLE FOR A SECOND
TIME, WHAT IS IT THAT KEEPS HIM
SO MOTIVATED?

MYSTERY SOLVED!

WHAT DRIVES *Rey Mysterio Jr.*?



Photos by Duane Long



Over the course of his career, Mysterio has taken the type of beating that is hard to watch. But, as he points out, he has pushed through and kept fighting, while people like Batista have quit and moved on.

Rey's connection to his fans has been a driving force through his career. They are not the driving force, however. Nor is it proving that a little man can survive in the land of the giants, nor is it winning titles or even keeping his mask.

BY DON STRADLEY

The WWE locker room exploded with excitement when Rey Mysterio Jr. regained the WWE World title at the Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view. Sure, they'd secretly rooted for Mysterio, partly because the entire roster benefits when a figure as popular as Mysterio is in the top spot. Attendance picks up, ratings pick up, and the WWE Universe in general feels like a happier place.

But after Mysterio won the belt by toppling Jack Swagger, C.M. Punk, and The Big Show, the celebration was tinged with a question, as many in the dressing room and in the offices of THE WRESTLER wondered about Mysterio's future. For after winning a second world title, what could possibly motivate Mysterio now? He has, after all, done everything a man can do in this sport.

Trying to figure out what drives Mysterio was a genuine puzzle, and while many theories have been put forth, none were especially compelling.

For instance, it used to be commonly accepted that Mysterio worked hard just to prove that a man of his size could compete in WWE. By now, though, he's proven that he can rumble with men of all sizes. So throw out that theory.

"I once thought the mask motivated him," said Chris Jericho. "But I unmasked him [in WCW], and he's still as pesky as an ant in my ear canal. Obviously, it's not the mask."

"I think the fans certainly motivate Mysterio," offered Jerry Lawler. "Mysterio grew up where fans of lucha libre cry real tears when their idols lose. It's in his DNA to please the fans."

A reasonable point, but Mysterio has had the fans on his side for years. They love him, and always will.

We sometimes assume he is driven by winning championships, as most wrestlers are, but he's won plenty of titles. In fact, Mysterio was winning championships when half the WWE roster was still begging their moms to let them stay up late to watch Shotgun Saturday.



Photo by George Napolitano



Though he has toned down his act somewhat as a means of self-preservation, Mysterio is quite capable of the spectacular, like simultaneously hitting The Big Show and C.M. Punk with a 6-1-9 during the Fatal 4-Way.

It was Mysterio himself who finally set us straight regarding his current motivation.

"The championship is nice," Mysterio told *The Wrestler*, "but you can't keep the belt forever. The one thing I can keep, though, is my self-respect. It's very important to keep your self-respect, especially if you're a family man, as I am.

"But let me tell you, self-respect is difficult to maintain in this sport. The night I regained the championship, I saw the legendary Brett Hart get manhandled by the Nexus bunch, which was disgraceful. Since I joined WWE in 2002, I've seen friendships fall apart, and I've seen people humiliated. The dog-eat-dog nature of the business puts us in these positions."

Mysterio's plan is very basic.

"I have to stay sharp, and stay

healthy. I can't afford to be anything less than 100 percent of what I'm capable of being. That's what motivates me."

It might sound very clichéd, but in Mysterio's case, it's quite literally true. He understands the plight of a little man in a big man's sport, and he refuses to take anything for granted.

"Look at a guy like Allen Iverson," he said of the 6', 165-pound former Philadelphia 76'ers guard who went from MVP to being pretty much washed-up by the time he reached his early-30s. "He inspired me, he had all the ability in the world. But he didn't take care of himself and he let his career slide."

Mysterio is a 35-year-old world champion, while "The Answer" is wondering if any NBA team is still willing to carry him on their roster. A.I. is a fearless point guard who consistently gives up his body against behemoths to get to the basket, yet his injury list pales in comparison to Mysterio's. It's never been easy for

Rey and, with age, it only promises to get tougher.

Prior to Fatal 4-Way, Mysterio took part in brutal feuds with Punk and Batista. There were nights when he seemed to take more punishment than his small frame could possibly withstand. But it was Mysterio who survived.

"Sure, I took some beatings, but Punk ended up bald, and Batista quit the company. Who became champion? Me, Rey Mysterio. How? Because my self-respect is more important to me than anything those two jokers were fighting for."

Still, as one WWE insider told *The Wrestler*, the weariness is beginning to show on Rey. "He may still smile like a kid, but his body is feeling the cumulative effects of competing at that size with that style for so long," our source said.

It's true that Mysterio no longer flies around the ring like a bat. New fans might find it hard to believe, but he was once even more spectacular than he is now, seeming to actually



The Big Show had become quite adept at anticipating flying moves and turning them to his advantage. If it ever reaches the point where Mysterio's moves lose the element of surprise, he'll know it's time to say good-bye.

soar on unseen wind currents. He's a bit heavier, and his flying maneuvers, although still effective, are not what they once were.

But even as Mysterio focuses on self-respect, he knows it will take only another serious injury, or a few more birthdays, for him to become a colorful little trialhorse for the younger stars to pick on. It's the natural course of

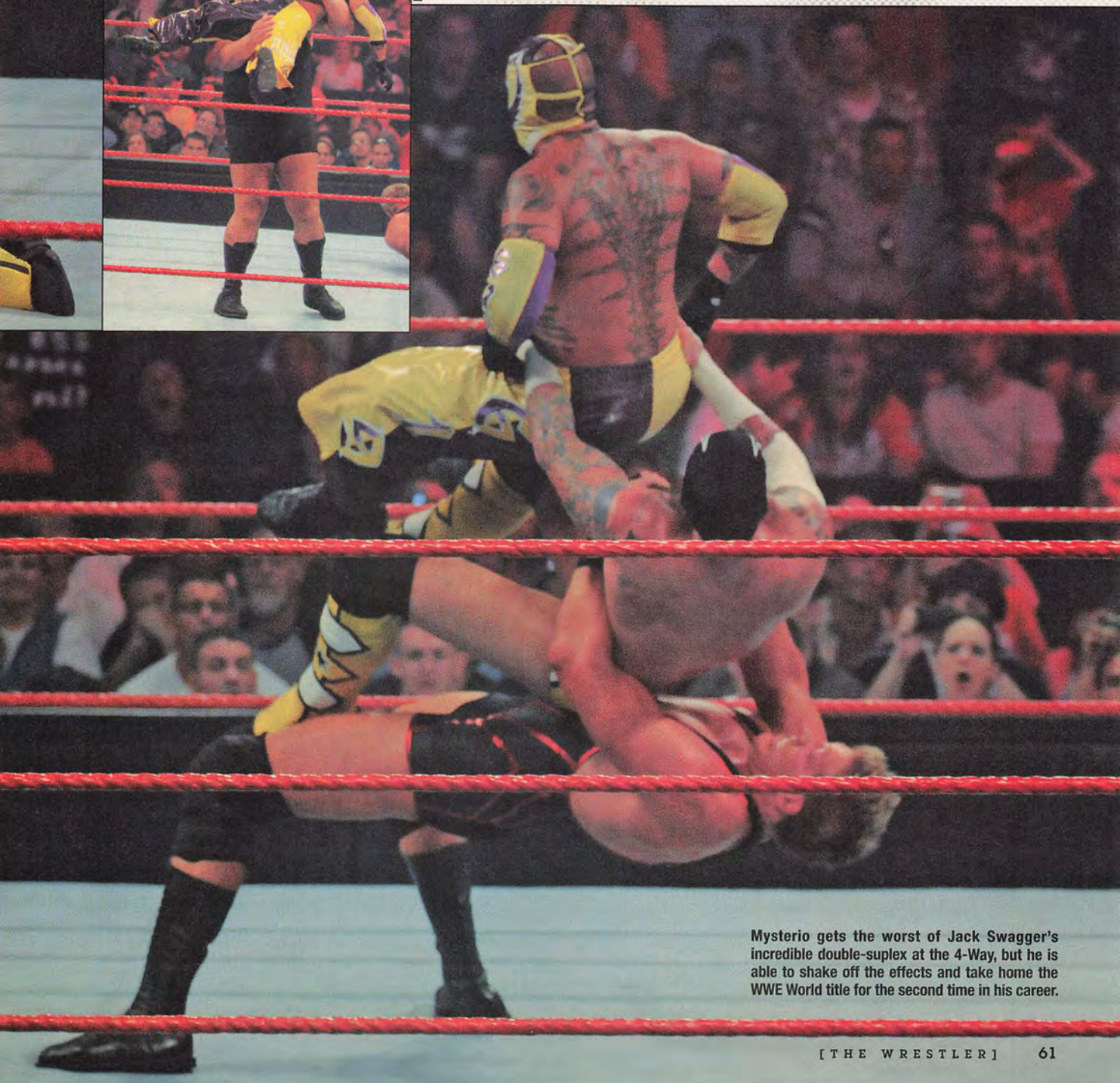
things in the business.

"I don't want to be applauded by fans who remember the good old days, while some young tiger is stomping my head in," he said. "There's no self-respect in that. That's why I have to leave my heart and soul in the ring every night. When I don't think I can maintain my self-respect in the ring, I'll know it's time to get out.


"But that's a few years away," he concluded with a smile.

If you doubt him, you probably didn't think he'd win the championship again, either. □

Photos by George Napolitano



Mysterio gets the worst of Jack Swagger's incredible double-suplex at the 4-Way, but he is able to shake off the effects and take home the WWE World title for the second time in his career.



If Ric Flair had just accepted Jay Lethal's impersonation graciously, he could have avoided the embarrassment of being trapped in his own signature submission hold, the figure-four leglock. It's unfortunate that Flair has suddenly become so sensitive.

The impersonations that started as means to entertain his family and the boys in the locker room have landed Jay Lethal at TNA's main-event level. It's a good thing for Jay that the "Nature Boy" wasn't very good-natured about it!

LETHAL IMPRESSIONS

JAY'S MAIN EVENT MOCKERY NOT A HIT WITH EVERYONE!

BY DAVID VANDVER | PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING



Take the man, you gotta be the man. That's not a typo. On the contrary, it's Jay Lethal's strategy for getting under the skin of a wrestling legend. For more than 35 years, Ric Flair has been unmatched in verbal sparring sessions. Few have challenged the "Nature Boy" on the mike and come away unscathed. But Lethal found a way. His dead-on

impersonations of Flair have left the usually cocky and confident "Nature Boy" rattled. Everybody but Flair himself knows that—originally at least—Lethal meant no harm with his spot-on impression. The 25-year-old idolized the all-time great as a child growing up in Elizabeth, New Jersey,

and offered the imitation as the sincerest form of flattery. The cranky Flair just did not accept it in the manner in which it was intended.

"One thing about Ric was that I thought he had a sense of humor," said Lethal. "His reaction shocked me."

He's not complaining, mind you. For a man whose physical abilities have always received universal praise but never lifted him much higher than the mid-card, Lethal is somewhat mystified his ability to

mimic the legends has done the trick.

"Strange business," he surmised.

It was during a hilarious series of skits in early-2007 called the "Paparazzi Championship Series" that Lethal unveiled his unusual gift. An impression of Randy "Macho Man" Savage, intended as a one-off comedy moment, turned out to be so popular, it became

his ticket to what was then his highest-profile run in wrestling: Black Machismo.

One would think that perfecting an impersonation would take hours of practice in front of mirrors and groups of friends, right? Not for Lethal. As a child, Savage was among his favorite wrestlers, and Jay began mimicking him to entertain his father and brothers. He

continued doing the impression during his up-and-coming years, amusing the boys in almost every locker room he was in on the independent circuit.

Surely, Flair knows that he is no longer a match for a 25-year-old just reaching the prime of his career. Lethal only wanted to honor the "Nature Boy"; now he's put in a position where he

"Savage was one of the people who attracted me to wrestling, so it came naturally to me," he said. "As far as his mannerisms go,

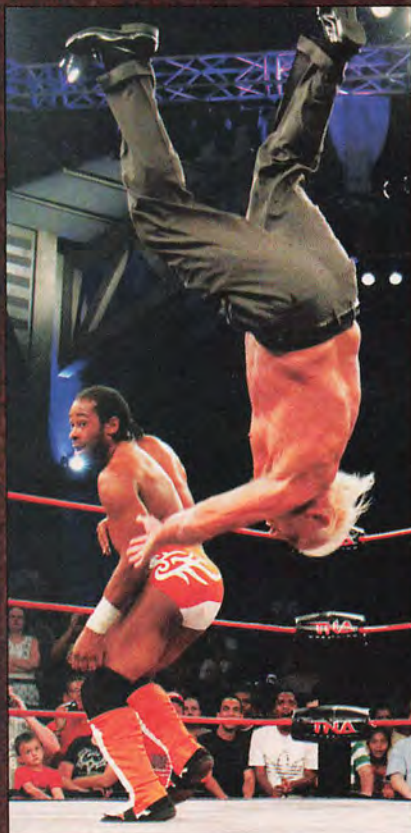
Flair and Lethal have a "whoaaa-off (below)," much to the delight of the fans at Orlando's Impact Zone. One day, perhaps, Ric will come to his senses and realize that the young man's initial intent was to flatter him.

I got the 'Macho Man' down pat because he had all those weird, funky movements, a lot of finger gestures."

The only aspect of his Savage im-

Lethal's impersonation of Randy Savage was so dead-on, the "Macho Man" called Jay to tell him to keep up the good work. Savage ... Flair ... Who's next?

pression he finds difficult is trying to match the bizarre promo style for which Savage became known. "The hardest part is his interviews didn't



make much sense, so sometimes I'm a little inclined to make too much sense, and I have to go a little off the wall."

When asked if he had any idea he could sustain Black Machismo, Lethal laughed. "Of course not. I would do the impression in the locker room all the time and the one who loved it was Kevin Nash. He got me to do the impression on [the "Paparazzi Idol"] skit and I haven't been able to stop."

Knowing how popular Black Machismo became, and the success it bought Lethal, one wonders what the "Macho Man" thinks. Lethal actually received a highly complimentary phone call after he started doing the impression from someone claiming to be Randy Savage. Jay wasn't sure at the time if the caller was Savage or just another impressionist. Shortly after, Lethal worked with Savage's brother, Lanny Poffo, who agreed to call Randy to verify it. "As soon as he got home, he e-mailed me right away saying that the call really came from him, and that he loved what I was doing. That was unbelievable."

Lethal assumed—incorrectly—that Flair would feel the same way. On the May 3 episode of TNA Impact, Lethal cut a fantastic promo doing his dead-on impersonation of Ric Flair. Lethal had intended to pay homage to his childhood hero, and return Flair's Hall of Fame ring, given to him by Hulk Hogan. Flair stormed into the ring and dressed down Lethal. Jay pleaded his case, to which Flair responded by slapping his face. Normally good-natured, Lethal finally had had enough and went on the attack, leaving Flair lying in the ring. Over the next few weeks, Lethal continued mocking Flair, leading to one of the most memorable confrontations in recent memory. Flair, backed in the ring by his new faction, Fortune, found he was face-to-face with himself in a surreal exchange that included both men dropping elbows on sports jackets, trading Flair's trademark lines. For the first time, Flair seemed flustered as Lethal proved his equal.

As accurate as the Flair impersonation is, Lethal was never quite comfortable with it. "Before I went out there, I did not feel that I had it down good enough that it was going to be a big hit," he admitted.



Lethal takes out Flair's charges, AJ Styles and Kazarian. With all the time Jay has put in to perfecting his wrestling skills, it took his ability to mimic legends to raise his status to the main-event level.

"The guys in the back think it's great, but me personally, I didn't think it was that good. When I got home and watched it on television, I understood they were right."

Unlike Savage, impersonating Flair was new territory. "I actually didn't realize I was able to do the Ric Flair impersonation until last January. TNA went over to the U.K., and on one of our off days it got real quiet, so I just busted out with this Ric Flair impersonation."

Fans particularly love the subtleties he adds, such as when he turns to a spectator in perfect Flair fashion, demanding, "Shut up, right now!" He attributes that to his father's influence. "I am real big on details," he said. "I remember watching a Ric Flair match with my dad a long time ago, and my dad would jump all over little stuff like that. Flair would be cutting a promo and he would stop and tell someone to shut up. My dad would laugh uncontrollably, so it became easy for me to pick up on little details like that because my dad found them hilarious."

In doing Flair, only the vocal inflections are difficult for Lethal. "I can only do the Ric Flair impersonation if I am yelling," he confessed. "I cannot talk softly like him, I can only sound like him when I am screaming at the top of my lungs."

At the time Lethal is doing his impersonation, he is concentrating so

deeply on the character that he doesn't even hear the crowd's reaction. "That's one thing about the impressions," he said. "When I go out there and I'm just Jay Lethal, I can hear the crowd. When I go out there and I'm doing Ric Flair or doing the 'Macho Man,' I am so wrapped up in that character that sometimes it's hard for me to hear the fans because I am constantly thinking of what to say next. It's got to make sense, it's got to fit this character."

Impersonations have certainly boosted Lethal's career. Black Machismo brought him into the upper mid-card, establishing him as a viable player in TNA. The Flair impression garnered him a pay-per-view match with an aptly self-proclaimed "wrestling god." Essentially, it has made a dream come true.

What does the future hold for Jay and his remarkable gift of mimicry? Lethal was cryptic in his response, recalling the origin of the Flair impression. "Somebody asked me that the other day and I said there is only one way to find out. Next year, January 2011, TNA is going to the U.K. again, and when I get over there I am going to find out who else I can imitate." He did, however, insinuate that a Hulk Hogan impression would be within his capabilities.

Ever wonder how Jay would look in red and yellow, brother?

THE WRESTLING ANALYST

JOHN MORRISON

Years Pro: 7

Size: 6'1", 219

"PWI 500" Listings:

2010: 27

2009: 46

2008: 43

2007: 56

2006: 72

2005: 80

2004: 160

Titles: OVW Southern tag team
ECW heavyweight

WWE Intercontinental (3 times)

WWE tag team (4 times)

PWI Awards: Most Improved Wrestler of the
Year (2009)

Tag Team of the Year (2005)

Photo by George Napolitano

[THE NUMBERS]

Offense (8.0): The only time Morrison moves in slow motion is during his entrance, which might just be the most magnificent one in wrestling (aside from that of his longtime manager Melina). From the moment the bell rings, Morrison mixes full-on aggression with finesse and grace. Sometimes he errs on the side of flashiness—he is known as a rock star, after all—and moves like his split-legged corkscrew moonsault prove more dazzling than dangerous.

Defense (8.0): There's no doubt that Morrison got a sound education in wrestling fundamentals, as his schooling was televised on the third season of *Tough Enough*. He has come a long way since then, but you can still see the self-preservation skills he learned from trainers Al Snow, Bill DeMott, and Ivory. Morrison may be his own worst enemy, however, as his sizable ego often lands him in perilous predicaments.

Experience (8.0): It's hard to believe, but amid WWE's current youth revolution, Morrison is nearing the status of veteran. Morrison's accomplishments speak for themselves, from his multiple title reigns to his take-all-comers approach to competition. All he needs now is a run at the very top of WWE, and we believe that reign could be right around the corner.

Conditioning (9.5): Even Morrison's abs have abs. Aside from his 12-pack, Morrison has the kind of physique that inspires millions of other men to toil fruitlessly in gyms around the world. And Morrison is not merely a sculpted bodybuilder; he is an elite athlete whose surfing and parkour skills are nearly as impressive as his in-ring abilities.

Stamina (9.0): What's remarkable about Morrison is that he often seems to finish his matches with more energy and intensity than when he starts them. His signature moves, particularly the split-legged corkscrew moonsault he calls Starship Pain, requires an incredible amount of precision and finesse. Few competitors in professional wrestling, or any sport for that matter, exhibit the kind of lasting power shown by the self-proclaimed "Guru Of Greatness."

Science (9.0): While he'll likely never be counted in the pantheon of technical wrestling greats like Dory Funk Jr. and Frank Gotch, Morrison's fundamentals are sound enough that he can adapt to practically any match type. Where Morrison truly shines, however, is when he has the opportunity to launch his innovative and dynamic assaults. From the corkscrew neckbreaker to his Nitro Blast superkick, Morrison's arsenal is becoming a science unto itself.

Power (8.0): There's no doubt that Morrison is strong—a fact evidenced by his enviable physique. But he is by no means a power-based wrestler, at least compared to many of the true

behemoths on the roster. Morrison understands that speed, momentum, and ring savvy will, in the long run, always outperform brute force.

Speed (10.0): Morrison is one of those rare athletes whose movements are so graceful that his raw speed isn't really evident. That's the beauty of his attack: Before an opponent realizes what is happening to him and can mount a counter, it's already done. Opponents have been known to become spectators at their own matches, marveling at what Morrison can do and how quickly he can do it.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (8.0): Don't let his chiseled good looks fool you—Morrison enjoys doling out beatings, and can withstand his share of abuse. He has survived ladder matches and Extreme Rules matches, not to mention the daily abuse of defending the championships he has held. Is he truly the "New Face Of Extreme," as he once boasted? True hardcore brawlers would surely beg to differ.

Quality Of Opposition (9.0): As good a team as M-N-M was, it often seemed that Morrison was destined to be a singles competitor. He has truly shined over the past several years, holding his own against many top competitors in WWE. But he has yet to fully achieve long-term main-event status. Until he faces the full gamut of competition—from Triple-H to The Undertaker to Rey Mysterio Jr.—he may find himself falling just short of true greatness.

① Morrison not only has no fear of flying, he has no fear of landing. To his credit, he has become more judicious as to the risk/reward factor associated with each move in his vast arsenal.

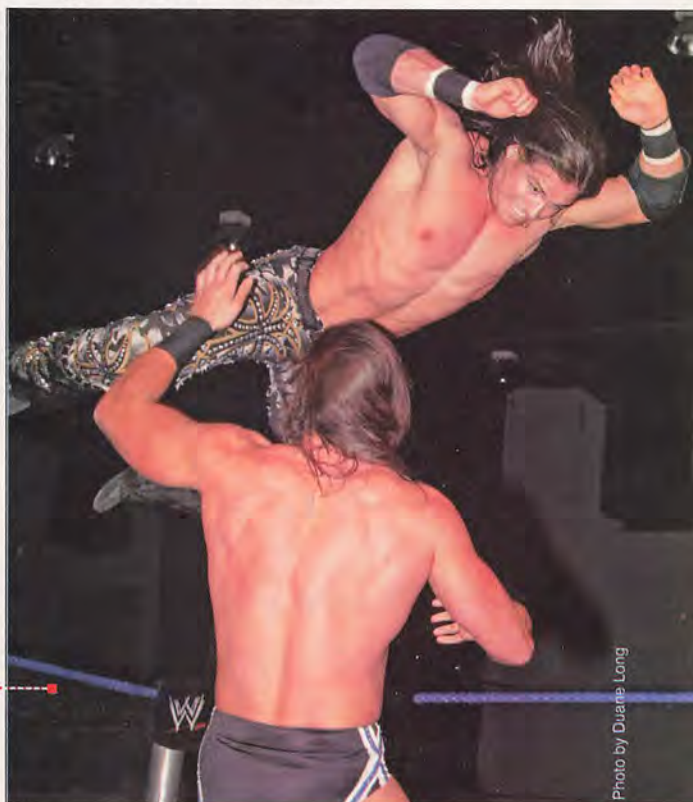


Photo by Duarte Long



Photo by George Napolitano

- ② Starship Pain is an extremely effective maneuver ... when it lands. While its execution is a thing of beauty, Morrison's connect rate is not high enough for it to be considered a dependable finisher.

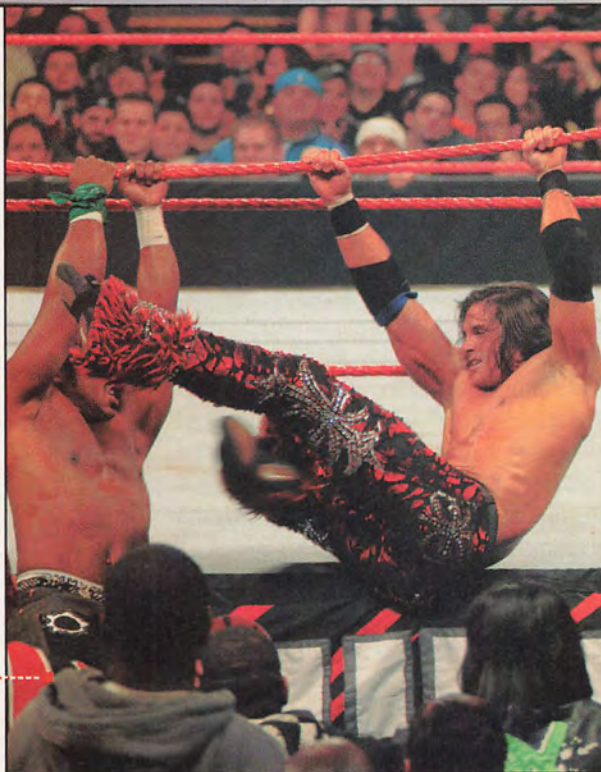
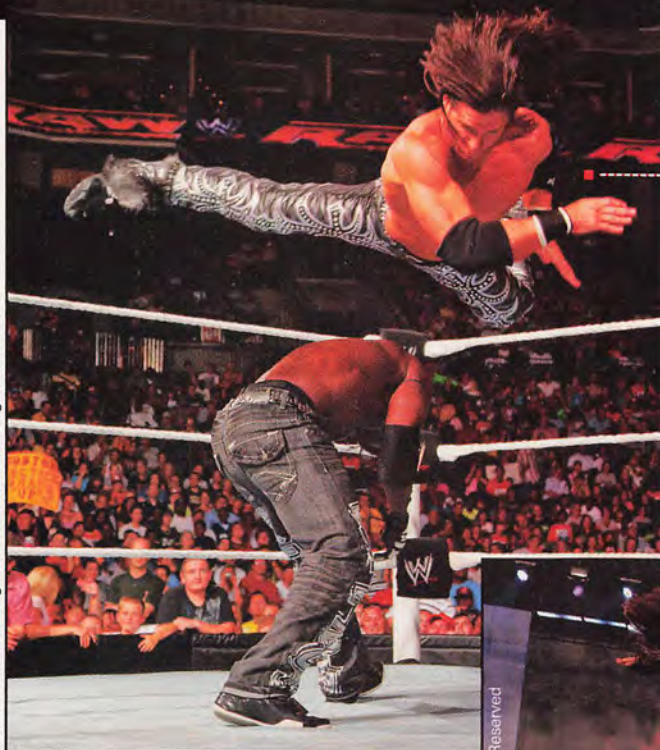


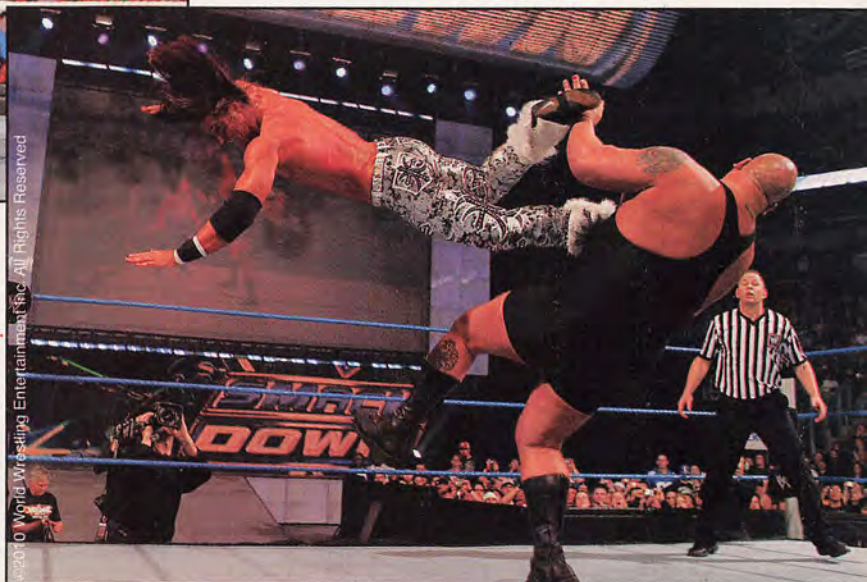
Photo by George Napolitano

- ③ Though extremely innovative, Morrison isn't too proud to borrow from wrestlers like Rey Mysterio Jr., as seen in this variation of the 6-1-9 against JTG.



Having a vast aerial repertoire is great, but unless you have the ability to get off the ground, what will it get you? Morrison's leaping ability is not a gift; it comes from hours of leg work in the gym. ④

⑤ To beat a man a foot taller and a quarter-ton heavier requires the ability to put him in a position where he cannot smother you with his mass or deliver a knockout blow. Morrison has been effective against men like Big Show, but is troubled by strong men with more agility, like Triple-H.



[THE ANALYSIS]

REPERTOIRE: One facet of John Morrison that has been evident since his first appearance on *Tough Enough* is his natural aptitude for learning the Sport of Kings. He is a prodigious talent who never stops improving. His already impressive arsenal of high-flying attacks needs to be complimented with some more mat-based fundamentals. No doubt, he'll continue to refine and improve his game.

STRENGTHS: Cockiness can often work against a brash young wrestler, but Morrison's narcissism seems to work in his favor. Because he considers himself perfect, he strives for perfection in everything he does inside the ring. He moves with the agility of a gymnast, but strikes with the ferocity and precision of a cobra.

WEAKNESSES: Sometimes Morrison seems so concerned with looking good, he may actually sacrifice *being* good. While flash and pizzazz certainly have their place in professional wrestling, sometimes a bit of ugly brutality is what's needed to score a pinfall. Morrison loves hearing the women squeal when he removes his entrance attire, but needs to concentrate

on hearing opponents moan in pain.

DEFINING CAREER MOMENT: In most cases, that moment comes with a key title victory or a switch in ring philosophy. In the case of John Morrison, it was when he became John Morrison in 2007. Everything about him changed at that point. He was still the same man with the same gifts, but he actually became his character. His confidence level raised three notches, his moves were that much more crisply executed and effective. The overall effect was far more important than any singular achievement.

FUTURE: Morrison's ascension over the past seven years has been remarkable, from his early days as a *Tough Enough* rookie and lackey for Eric Bischoff to his impressive championship reigns and hugely entertaining promos. He has yet to be fully tested against the best competition WWE has to offer, but he's young, relatively injury-free, and highly ambitious. Morrison has all the potential to be professional wrestling's next Shawn Michaels. □

WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

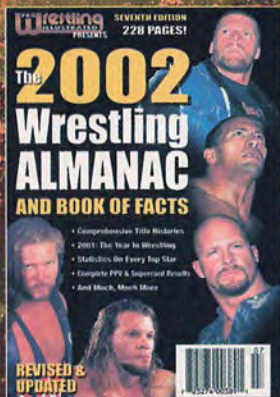
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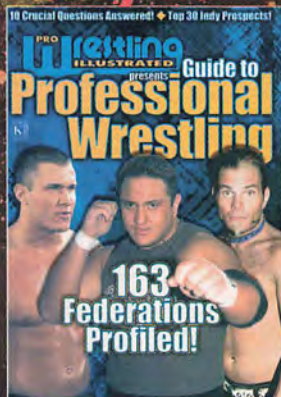
WRESTLING INSIDERS (Winter '99)
Go back through the years with wrestling's most respected columnists, including Dan Sheckel, Eddie Elmer, and Stu Sakis.



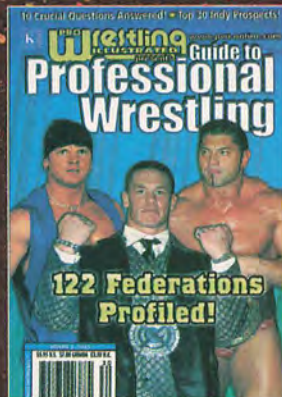
WRESTLING INSIDERS (Fall 2000)
Titles, holds and maneuvers, supercards, tag teams, hall of famers, the state of the game. You want our opinion? Buy the magazine!



2002 WRESTLING ALMANAC
The seventh annual edition updates our historical records and takes a look back at the year 2001.



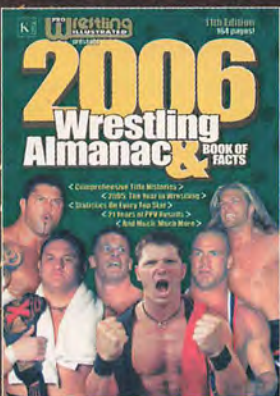
PWI GUIDE TO PRO WRESTLING (2004)
More than 160 pro wrestling federations profiled, 10 crucial questions for 2005, top 30 prospects. Digest format.



PWI GUIDE TO PRO WRESTLING (2005)
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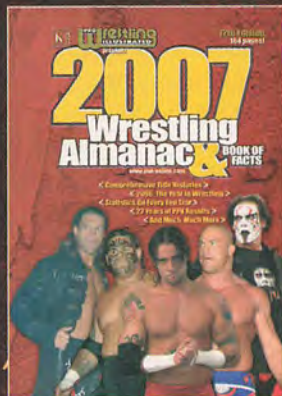
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Insider scouting reports on 50 stars, color pinups galore. 164 pages.



2006 WRESTLING ALMANAC
Pay-per-view and title-lineage updates, a look back at the top stories of 2005, plus much more.



REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS (October 2005)
Grading the top 50 stars in the sport today. 164 pages.



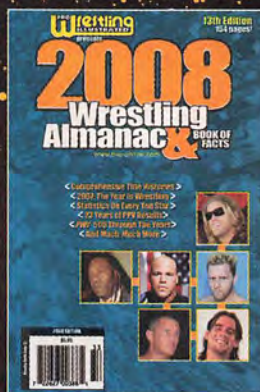
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2006 in review, plus pay-per-view run-down, title histories, and much more.



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Back with our grades for the sport's top 50 stars. 164 pages.



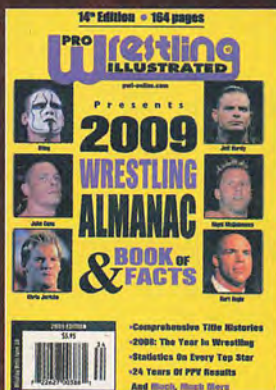
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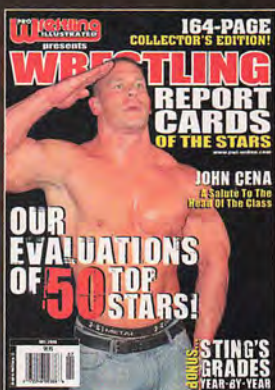
2008 WRESTLING ALMANAC
A review of the biggest stories of 2007, plus title chronology and PPV result updates, and more.



PWI 500 (October 2008)
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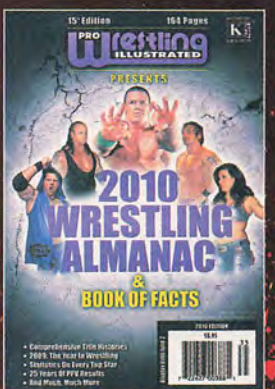
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2008 in review, comprehensive title histories, PPV history, and more.



REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS
(July 2009)
We might ask the wrestlers to get them signed by their parents! 164 pages.



2009 PWI 500 (October 2009)
It had been nine years since Triple-H last topped the list, and many criticized our choice. But based on his in-ring success, nobody was more deserving of the honor. 164 pages.



2010 WRESTLING ALMANAC
2009 in review, plus pay-per-view listing, guide to 'indies', title histories, and much more.

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- ☐ Wrestling Insiders (Fall 2000)
- ☐ 2002 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ PWI Guide To Pro Wrestling (2004)
- ☐ PWI Guide To Pro Wrestling (Vol. 2, 2005)
- ☐ PWI Wrestling Yearbook (Fall 2005)
- ☐ 2006 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ Report Cards Of The Stars (October 2006)
- ☐ 2007 Wrestling Almanac
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OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

- 1 SHEAMUS**
280, Dublin, Ireland
(-) WWE heavyweight champion
- 2 ROB VAN DAM**
236, Battle Creek, MI
(3) TNA World champion
- 3 REY MYSTERIO JR.**
175, San Diego, CA
(-) WWE World champion
- 4 JOHN CENA**
240, West Newbury, MA
(1) No. 1 contender WWE title
- 5 AJ STYLES**
215, Gainesville, GA
(5) No. 1 contender TNA World title
- 6 RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(6) No. 2 contender WWE title
- 7 TYLER BLACK**
210, Davenport, IA
(8) Ring of Honor champion
- 8 TOGI MAKABE**
240, Sagami-hara, Japan
(-) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 9 MINOURU SUZUKI**
225, Yokohama, Japan
(-) AJPW Triple Crown champion
- 10 ADAM PEARCE**
248, San Diego, CA
(-) NWA heavyweight champion



ADAM PEARCE

Photo by Joe Zanolle

TAG TEAMS

- 1 DAVID HART SMITH & TYSON KIDD**
Combined weight: 455 pounds
(1) WWE Unified tag team champions
- 2 CHRIS SABIN & ALEX SHELLEY**
Combined weight: 410 pounds
(6) TNA World tag title champions
- 3 CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**
Combined weight: 447 pounds
(2) ROH tag team champions
- 4 KEITH WALKER & BISON SMITH**
Combined weight: 560 pounds
(-) GHC tag team champions
- 5 JIMMY & JULES USO**
Combined weight: 562 pounds
(7) No. 1 contenders WWE Unified tag title
- 6 BIG DADDY VODOO & TARU**
Combined weight: 735 pounds
(-) AJPW All-Asia tag team champions
- 7 HUNICO & EPICO**
Combined weight: 410 pounds
(-) FCW tag team champions
- 8 KARL ANDERSON & GIANT BERNARD**
Combined weight: 571 pounds
(-) IWGP tag team champions
- 9 MARK & JAY BRISCOE**
Combined weight: 419 pounds
(10) No. 1 contenders ROH tag title
- 10 TAKESHI RIKIO & MUHAMMED YONE**
Combined weight: 500 pounds
(3) Pro Wrestling NOAH tag team champions

RAW

WWE Champion:
SHEAMUS

- (5) 280, Dublin, Ireland
- 1—JOHN CENA**
(C) 240, West Newbury, MA
 - 2—RANDY ORTON**
(2) 245, St. Louis, MO
 - 3—EDGE**
(1) 250, Toronto, ON
 - 4—THE MIZ**
(4) 231, Cleveland, OH
 - 5—EVAN BOURNE**
(8) 210, St. Louis, MO
 - 6—TED DIBIASE JR.**
(6) 235, Palm Springs, FL
 - 7—CHRIS JERICHO**
(3) 226, Manhasset, NY
 - 8—R-TRUTH**
(-) 228, Charlotte, NC
 - 9—JOHN MORRISON**
(7) 219, Los Angeles, CA
 - 10—MARK HENRY**
(-) 392, Silsbee, TX

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
REY MYSTERIO JR.

- (4) 175, San Diego, CA
- 1—JACK SWAGGER**
(C) 263, Perry, OK
 - 2—C.M. PUNK**
(5) 222, Chicago, IL
 - 3—THE BIG SHOW**
(2) 441, Aiken, SC
 - 4—KOFI KINGSTON**
(10) 218, Ghana, West Africa
 - 5—CHRISTIAN**
(-) 235, Toronto, Ontario
 - 6—CODY RHODES**
(9) 232, Charlotte, NC
 - 7—KANE**
(7) 323, Hell
 - 8—DREW McINTYRE**
(3) 270, Ayr, Scotland
 - 9—THE UNDERTAKER**
(-) 299, Death Valley, CA
 - 10—DOLPH ZIGGLER**
(6) 221, Hollywood, CA

TNA

World Champion:
ROB VAN DAM

- (C) 236, Battle Creek, MI
- 1—AJ STYLES**
(1) 215, Gainesville, GA
 - 2—MR. ANDERSON**
(6) 243, Green Bay, WI
 - 3—JEFF HARDY**
(3) 232, Cameron, SC
 - 4—ABYSS**
(2) 350, Parts Unknown
 - 5—DESMOND WOLFE**
(-) 220, London, England
 - 6—DOUG WILLIAMS**
(8) 235, Manchester, England
 - 7—ROB TERRY**
(10) 260, Cardiff, Wales
 - 8—KURT ANGLE**
(7) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
 - 9—MATT MORGAN**
(-) 310, Fairfield, CT
 - 10—SAMOA JOE**
(-) 280, Los Angeles, CA

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
TYLER BLACK

- (C) 210, Davenport, IA
- 1—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(-) 200, Waikiki, HI
 - 2—DAVEY RICHARDS**
(3) 205, Othello, WA
 - 3—EDDIE EDWARDS**
(5) 214, Boston, MA
 - 4—KEVIN STEEN**
(2) 220, Marietta, QC
 - 5—AUSTN ARIES**
(7) 202, Milwaukee, WI
 - 6—DELIRIOUS**
(9) 194, Edge of Sanity
 - 7—RODERICK STRONG**
(1) 212, Tampa, FL
 - 8—CHRIS HERO**
(-) 225, Metropolis
 - 9—KENNY KING**
(4) 230, Las Vegas, NV
 - 10—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**
(8) 240, Schaffhausen, Switz.

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (—) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED JULY 13, 2010

COMBAT ZONE WRESTLING: Champion—Jon Moxley; **1**—Drake Younger; **2**—Eddie Kingston; **3**—Ego Fantastico; **4**—Drew Gulak; **5**—Adam Cole; **6**—Sami Callihan; **7**—Joe Gacy; **8**—Sabian; **9**—J.C. Bailey; **10**—Zandig.

DRAGON GATE USA: Champion—BxB Hulk; **1**—Masaaki Mochizuki; **2**—YAMATO; **3**—Jon Moxley; **4**—Shingo; **5**—CIMA; **6**—Jimmy Jacobs; **7**—Masato Yoshino; **8**—Naruki Doi; **9**—Johnny Gargano; **10**—Gran Akuma.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Mega; **1**—Aden Chambers; **2**—Bazooka Joe; **3**—Freak Nasty; **4**—Andrew Ryker; **5**—Ryan Rush; **6**—Julian Starr; **7**—Bryan Logan; **8**—Matt Logan; **9**—Mozart Fontaine; **10**—Mr. Ooh La La.

EVOLVE: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Jimmy Jacobs; **2**—Chuck Taylor; **3**—Johnny Gargano; **4**—Brad Allen; **5**—Kyle O'Reilly; **6**—Chris Hero; **7**—Munenori Sawa; **8**—Claudio Castagnoli; **9**—Ikuto Hidaka; **10**—TJP.

FULL IMPACT PRO: Champion—Jon Moxley; **1**—Brad Allen; **2**—Roderick Strong; **3**—TJP; **4**—Erick Stevens; **5**—Rhett Titus; **6**—Jigsaw; **7**—Bruce Santee; **8**—Caleb Konley; **9**—Chasyn Rance; **10**—Francisco Ciatso.

JERSEY ALL-PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Dan Maff; **1**—Charlie Haas; **2**—Bandido Jr.; **3**—Samoa Joe; **4**—Homicide; **5**—Steve Corino; **6**—Nick Gage; **7**—Teddy Hart; **8**—Kazuchika Okada; **9**—Masato Tanaka; **10**—Brodie Lee.

NWA FUSION: Champion—Jimmy Cicero; **1**—Sean Denny; **2**—Mike Booth; **3**—C.A. Elliot; **4**—American Ranger; **5**—Mark Bravura; **6**—Brandon Day; **7**—Amazing Sanchezz; **8**—Krotch; **9**—Marky Denny; **10**—Victor Griff.

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA: Champion—Davey Richards; **1**—Karl Anderson; **2**—Johnny Goodtime; **3**—Dustin Cutler; **4**—Brian Kendrick; **5**—Scott Lost; **6**—Chris Hero; **7**—PAC; **8**—Necro Butcher; **9**—Joey Ryan; **10**—Roderick Strong.

RIVER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—Alyssa Flash; **1**—Numero Dos; **2**—Spector; **3**—Hernandez; **4**—SKAM 13; **5**—Sicodelico Jr.; **6**—Jax Dane; **7**—Ryan Sorenson; **8**—Ann Dromeda; **9**—Big Dogg; **10**—JoJo Bravo.

SHIMMER: Champion—Madison Eagles; **1**—MsChif; **2**—Cheerleader Melissa; **3**—Sara Del Rey; **4**—Mercedes Martinez; **5**—Ayako Hamada; **6**—Daizee Haze; **7**—Ayumi Kurihara; **8**—Nikki Roxx; **9**—Amazing Kong; **10**—LuFisto.

TEXAS WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Sicodelico Jr.; **2**—Keith Lee; **3**—Big Dogg; **4**—Jaykus Plinskin; **5**—Vince Vile; **6**—Alex Drazen; **7**—C.J. Xavier; **8**—Gabe The Babe; **9**—Chad Williams; **10**—Total P.I.M.P.

WOMEN SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: Champion—Mercedes Martinez; **1**—Jazz; **2**—Angel Orsini; **3**—Alicia; **4**—Awesome Kong; **5**—Brittney Savage; **6**—Nikki Roxx; **7**—Amber O'Neal; **8**—Jessicka Havok; **9**—Rain; **10**—Sassy Stephanie.

NWA

Champion:

ADAM PEARCE

(C) 248, San Diego, CA

1—PHIL SHATTER

(1) 247, Paris Island, SC

2—BLUE DEMON JR.

(2) 228, Mexico City, Mexico

3—SCOTTY MACK

(3) 205, Kelowna, B.C.

4—OLIVER JOHN

(4) 228, Sacramento, CA

5—SHANE HASTE

(5) 205, Queensland, Australia

6—THE SHEIK

(6) 265, Tehran, Iran

7—ANTONIO THOMAS

(7) 235, Panama City, FL

8—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(8) 245, Kyoto, Japan

9—SID SYLUM

(9) 218, Las Vegas, NV

10—LANCE CADE

(—) 267, San Antonio, TX

JAPAN

1—TOGI MAKABE

(—) 243, Sagami, Japan

IWGP heavyweight champion

2—TAKASHI SUGIURA

(2) 216, Aichi, Japan

GHC heavyweight champion

3—MINORU SUZUKI

(5) 225, Yokohama, Japan

AJPW Triple Crown champion

4—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(1) 245, Kyoto, Japan

5—GO SHIOZAKI

(7) 220, Kumamoto, Japan

6—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI

(6) 200, Saitama, Japan

7—HIROSHI TANAHASHI

(8) 231, Gifu, Japan

8—SUWAMA

(—) 265, Kanagawa, Japan

9—KAZ HAYASHI

(10) 183, Tokyo, Japan

10—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA

(—) 280, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

1—DR. WAGNER JR.

(2) 220, Torreón, Mexico

AAA heavyweight champion

2—L.A. PARK

(—) 275, Monterrey, Mexico

3—PERRO AGUAYO JR.

(—) 202, Mexico City, Mexico

4—ULTIMO GUERRERO

(4) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

CMLL heavyweight champion

5—GIGANTE BERNARD

(—) 331, Peabody, MA

6—JACK EVANS

(—) 165, Parkland, WA

7—SILVER KING

(—) 216, Torreón, Mexico

8—VOLADOR JR.

(—) 170, Monclova, Mexico

9—MISTICO

(9) 165, Mexico City, Mexico

10—MAXIMO

(—) 176, Mexico City, Mexico

WOMEN

1—ALICIA FOX

(—) 129, Ponte Vedre Beach, FL

WWE Divas champion

2—ANGELINA LOVE

(5) 118, Toronto, ON

TNA Knockouts champion

3—MERCEDES MARTINEZ

(6) 147, Waterbury, CT

4—SARA DEL REY

(—) 160, Martinez, CA

5—LAYLA EL

(3) 120, Miami, FL

WWE Women's champion

6—MADISON EAGLES

(5) 160, Sydney, Australia

7—VELVET SKY

(—) 125, New York, NY

8—MARYSE

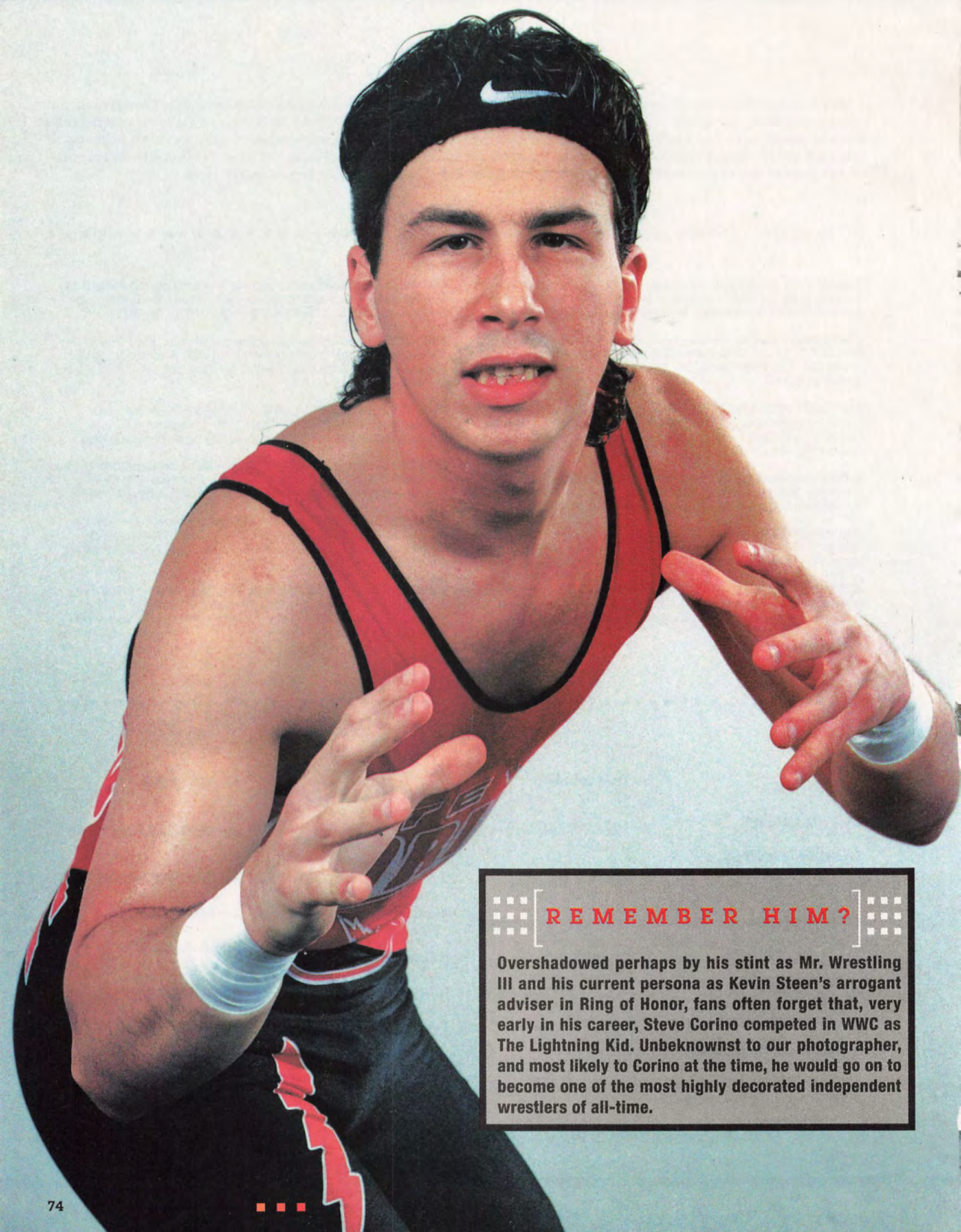
(—) 125, Montreal, QC

9—MICHELLE MCCOOL

(7) 135, Palatka, FL

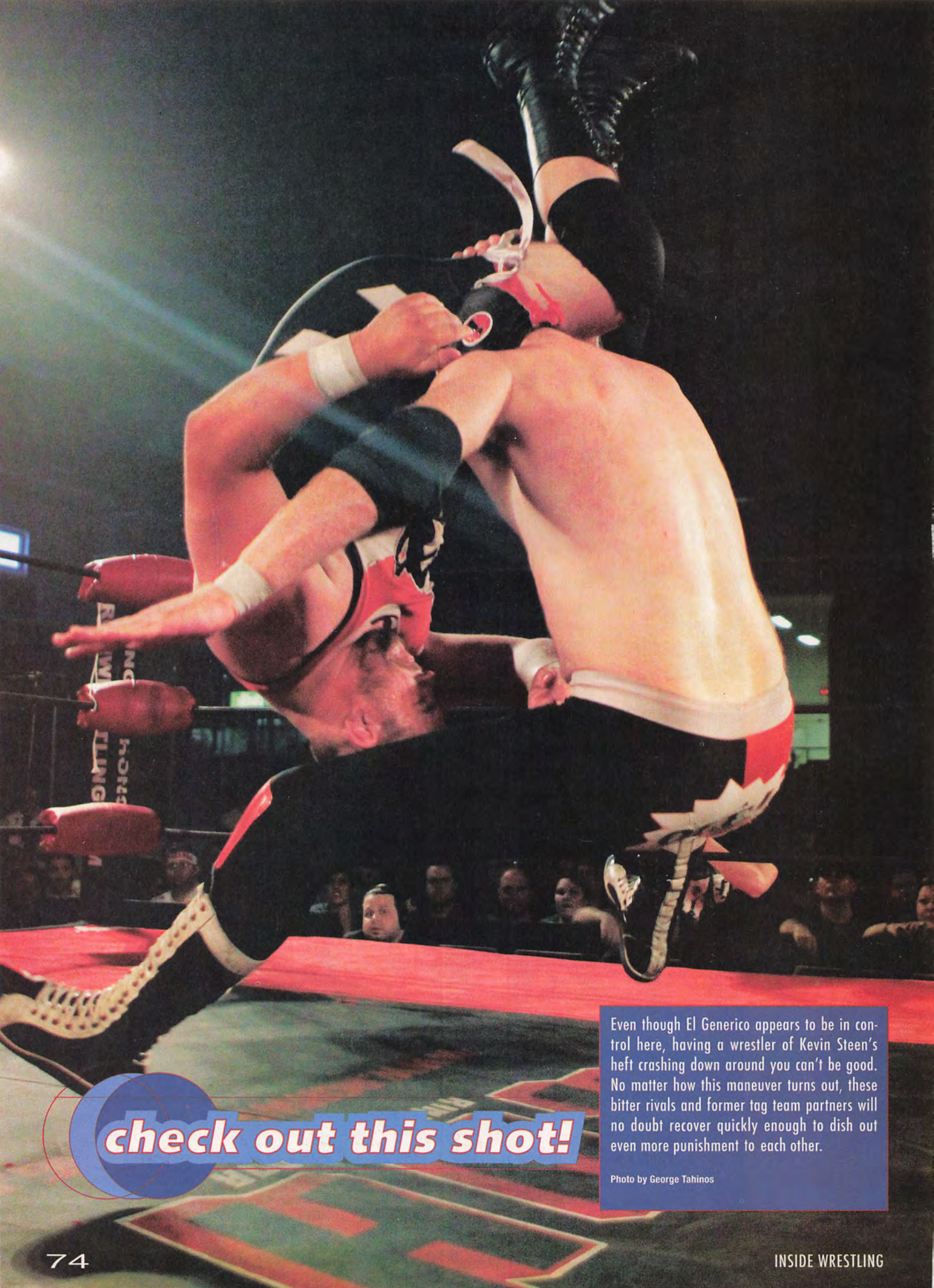
10—MELISSA COATES

(—) 145, Los Angeles, CA



REMEMBER HIM?

Overshadowed perhaps by his stint as Mr. Wrestling III and his current persona as Kevin Steen's arrogant adviser in Ring of Honor, fans often forget that, very early in his career, Steve Corino competed in WWC as The Lightning Kid. Unbeknownst to our photographer, and most likely to Corino at the time, he would go on to become one of the most highly decorated independent wrestlers of all-time.



check out this shot!

Even though El Generico appears to be in control here, having a wrestler of Kevin Steen's heft crashing down around you can't be good. No matter how this maneuver turns out, these bitter rivals and former tag team partners will no doubt recover quickly enough to dish out even more punishment to each other.

Photo by George Tahinos



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Volume XIV, 2007: "TNA To The Extreme! Will Paul Heyman Lead An ECW Faction To Florida?" Plus: Kelly Kelly, Petey Williams, Bryan Danielson, Mr. Kennedy, Cena vs. K-Fed, James Mitchell, Finlay.

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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended July 12, 2010

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & AKEBONO
(July 4, 2010; from Masakatsu Funaki & Keiji Mutoh; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KAZ HAYASHI
(February 6, 2009; from Naomichi Marufuji; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: MINORU SUZUKI
(May 5, 2010; from Ryota Hama; Tokyo, Japan)

ECWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BAZOOKA JOE
(September 12, 2009; from Chase Del Monte; Newark, DE)

ECWA MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: ADEN CHAMBERS
(March 20, 2010; from Nick Logan; Newark, DE)

ECWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RYAN RUSH & JULIAN STARR
(March 20, 2010; from Matt & Bryan Logan; Newark, DE)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ALEX RILEY
(March 18, 2010; from Justin Gabriel; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: EPICO & HUNICO
(June 3, 2010; from Jimmy & Jules Uso; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JON MOXLEY
(April 17, 2010, beat Roderick Strong to claim the vacant title; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRIS GREY & TOMMY TAYLOR
(October 3, 2009; from Erick Stevens & Roderick Strong; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: BRAD ALLEN
(October 3, 2009; from Rhett Titus; Crystal River, FL)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHRIS STEELER
(June 26, 2010; from Fady the Arabian Bull; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TOGI MAKABE
(May 3, 2010; from Shinsuke Nakamura; Fukuoka, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & KARL ANDERSON
(June 19, 2010; from Wataru Inoue & Yuji Nagata; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: PRINCE DEVITT
(June 19, 2010; from Naomichi Marufuji; Osaka, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ADAM PEARCE
(March 14, 2010; from Blue Demon Jr.; Charlotte, NC)

NWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER
(October 4, 2008; from Phoenix Star & Zokre; Robstown, TX)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 27, 2008; from Amazing Kong; Cape Girardeau, MO)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JAMES THOMAS
(June 18, 2010; beat Mike Mondo and Beef Wellington in a three-way; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TED McNALER & ADAM REVOLVER
(March 24, 2010; from Benjamin Bray & Andrew LaCroix; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: ALI
(June 9, 2009; from Jamin Olivencia; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TARYN SHAY
(June 26, 2010; from CJ Lane; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: DAVEY RICHARDS
(February 27, 2010; from Kenny Omega; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: EL GENERICO & PAUL LONDON
(May 9, 2010; from Matt & Nick Jackson; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: TAKASHI SUGIURA
(December 6, 2009; from Go Shiozaki; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: YOSHINOBU KANEMARU
(October 31, 2009; from Jushin Liger; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BISON SMITH & KEITH WALKER
(April 14, 2010; from Takeshi Rikio & Mohammad Yone; Osaka, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: TYLER BLACK
(February 13, 2010; from Austin Aries; New York, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(April 3, 2010; from Jay & Mark Briscoe; Charlotte, NC)

RING OF HONOR TV CHAMPION: EDDIE EDWARDS
(March 5, 2010; defeated Davey Richards in the final of a tournament to name inaugural champion; Philadelphia, PA)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MADISON EAGLES
(April 11, 2010; from MsChif; Berwyn, IL)

TNA GLOBAL CHAMPION: ROB TERRY
(January 27, 2010; from Eric Young; Cardiff, Wales)

TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION: ANGELINA LOVE
(July 11, 2010; from Madison Rayne; Orlando, FL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MADISON RAYNE, VELVET SKY, & LACEY VON ERICH
(March 8, 2010; defeated Angelina Love & Tara and Sarita & Taylor Wilde for the vacant title; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: ROB VAN DAM
(April 19, 2010; from AJ Styles; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ALEX SHELLY & CHRIS SABIN
(July 11, 2010; defeated Robert Roode & James Storm in the final of a tournament for the vacant title; Orlando, FL)

TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION: DOUGLAS WILLIAMS
(May 16, 2010; from Kazarian; Orlando, FL)

WRESTLING SUPERSTARS LIVE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEITH WALKER
(February 21, 2009; from Ricky Landell; Michigan City, IN)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: KOFI KINGSTON
(May 23, 2010; from Drew McIntyre; Detroit, MI)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: REY MYSTERIO JR.
(June 20, 2010; defeated Jack Swagger, C.M. Punk, and The Big Show; Uniondale, NY)

WWE UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DAVID HART SMITH & TYSON KIDD
(April 26, 2010; from The Miz & The Big Show; Richmond, VA)

WWE CHAMPION: SHEAMUS
(June 20, 2010; defeated John Cena, Randy Orton, and Edge; Uniondale, NY)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: THE MIZ
(June 14, 2010; from R-Truth; Charlotte, NC)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: LAYLA
(May 11, 2010; from Beth Phoenix; Buffalo, NY)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: ALICIA FOX
(June 20, 2010; defeated Eve Torres, Gail Kim, and Maryse; Uniondale, NY)



Photo by George Napolitano



MARCH 30, 2008:

Successfully defends WWE title against John Cena and Triple-H at WrestleMania 24 and proclaims "The Age Of Orton"



Photo by George Napolitano

JANUARY 19, 2009:

Viciously attacks Vince McMahon after The Chairman was about to fire him for challenging Stephanie McMahon's authority



Photo by George Napolitano

OCTOBER 4, 2009:

Beats John Cena in a Hell in a Cell match to win fifth WWE championship

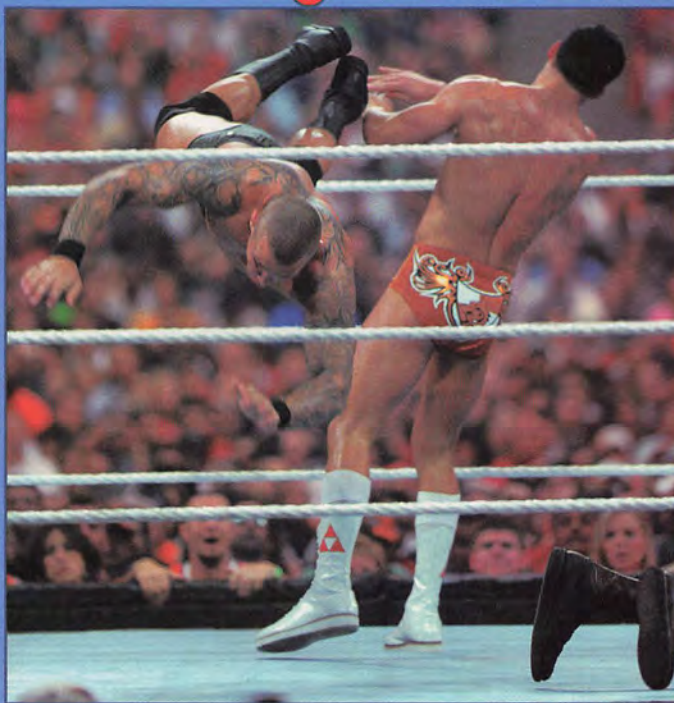
DECEMBER 8, 2008:

Forms the Legacy stable with fellow multi-generational talents Cody Rhodes and Manu (and later, Ted DiBiase Jr.); trio defeats Triple-H and Batista in a handicap match



JUNE 15, 2009:

Captures vacant WWE title, defeating Triple-H, Cena, and The Big Show



MARCH 28, 2010:

Defeats former Legacy pupils Rhodes and DiBiase in a triple-threat match at WrestleMania 26, hearing the cheers of the fans throughout

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wrestling timeline



Photo by George Napolitano

MARCH 13, 2007:

Falls to Bobby Lashley in only attempt to win ECW championship

JUNE 3, 2007:

Loses to Rob Van Dam in a stretcher match at One Night Stand, but ends RVD's WWE tenure afterward by kicking him in the head and executing a DDT on the floor



Photo by George Napolitano

OCTOBER 7, 2007:

Is awarded vacant WWE championship by Vince McMahon, loses title to Triple-H, then recaptures it in a Last-Man-Standing match, all on the same night at No Mercy

APRIL 1, 2007:

Participates in Money in the Bank ladder match at WrestleMania 23, ultimately won by Mr. Kennedy

JULY 22, 2007:

Topples WWE legend Dusty Rhodes in a bullrope match at The Great American Bash

OCTOBER 28, 2007:

Successfully defends his WWE championship against Shawn Michaels at Cyber Sunday.

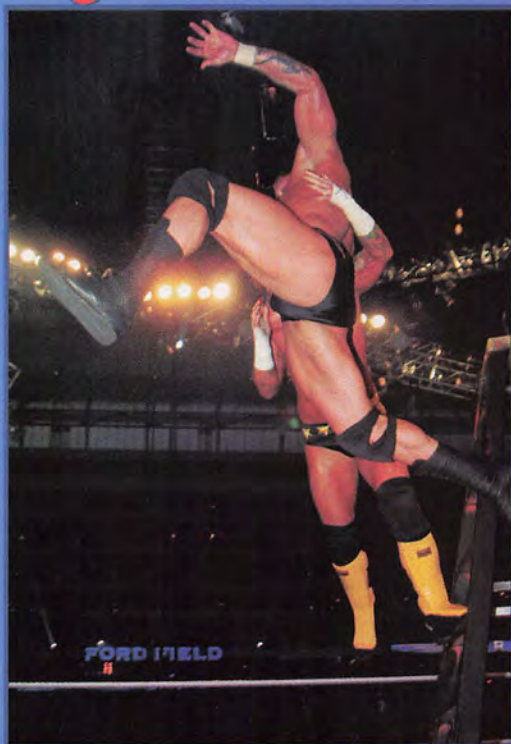
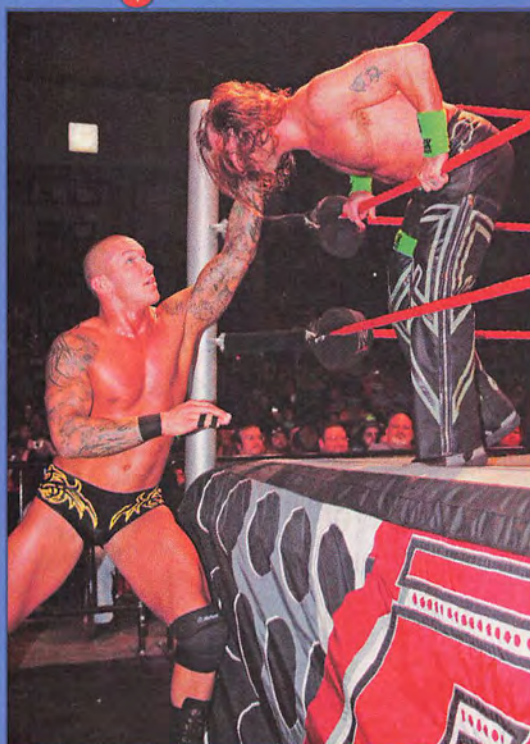


Photo by George Napolitano





DECEMBER 30, 2005:

Subbing for Booker T, Orton wrestles his first match in a best-of-seven series against Chris Benoit, who wins the match by DQ

AUGUST 6, 2006:

After mocking and insulting Hulk Hogan for weeks, Orton falls to "The Hulkster" at SummerSlam

NOVEMBER 5, 2006:

Rated RKO beats D-X at Cyber Sunday, with Eric Bischoff as special referee

JANUARY 29, 2006:

Enters the Royal Rumble at number 30, but is eliminated by Rey Mysterio Jr.

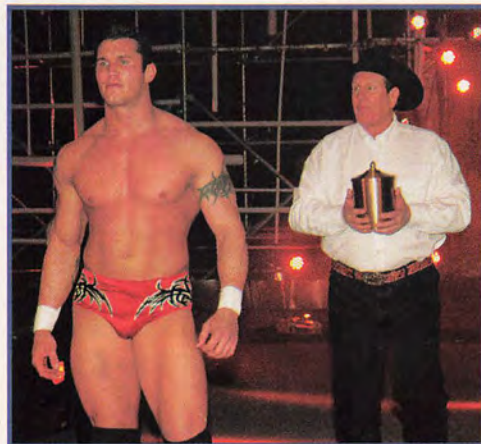
OCTOBER 9, 2006:

Forms Rated RKO Alliance with Edge and Lita, promising to take out D-X

NOVEMBER 13, 2006:

Teams with Edge to defeat Ric Flair and Roddy Piper for WWE World tag team title





OCTOBER 9, 2005:

Teams with father Bob to beat The Undertaker in a handicap casket match at No Way Out; lights fire to the casket afterward with The Undertaker locked inside

MARCH 21, 2005:

Shocks fans by RKOing girlfriend Stacy Keibler on *Raw*, after attacking "legends" Eric Bischoff and Jake Roberts in previous weeks

APRIL 15, 2005:

Undergoes shoulder surgery and misses several months of action

APRIL 3, 2005:

Fails in attempt to end The Undertaker's winning streak at WrestleMania 21, despite interference from father Cowboy Bob Orton

JUNE 16, 2005:

Makes surprise appearance after being drafted to Smackdown, helping John Bradshaw Layfield defeat The Undertaker

DECEMBER 18, 2005:

Loses to The Undertaker in a Hell in a Cell match at Armageddon, ending their long feud



Photo by Joe Zanolie



Photo by George Napolitano



JUNE 21, 2004:

Agitated by Orton's brash attitude and poor treatment of several WWE legends, The Rock confronts and attacks Orton during an episode of *Raw* from Miami, Florida



Photo by George Napolitano

AUGUST 15, 2004:

Defeats Chris Benoit at SummerSlam, becoming the youngest world champion in history at age 24

SEPTEMBER 12, 2004:

Loses World title to Triple-H

JULY 11, 2004:

Loses to Edge, ending longest Intercontinental title reign in seven years (210 days)

AUGUST 16, 2004:

Beats Benoit in a rematch, then is viciously bloodied by a jealous Triple-H, Flair, and Batista

JANUARY 30, 2005:

Suffers concussion in loss to Triple-H at Royal Rumble



wrestling timeline

Photo by Gary Dineen



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Photo by Duane Long



MAY 26, 2003:

Officially forms Evolution stable with Triple-H and Ric Flair; Batista would join shortly after

DECEMBER 14, 2003:

Pins Rob Van Dam to win the WWE Intercontinental championship

MARCH 14, 2004:

Teams with Evolution mates Ric Flair and Batista to defeat Foley and the Rock at WrestleMania XX; pins Foley after an RKO

NOVEMBER 24, 2003:

Beats Sgt. Slaughter in a "Legend-vs.-Legend Killer" match, selected via Raw Roulette

JANUARY 25, 2004:

Enters the Royal Rumble at number two and lasts more than 30 minutes; is eventually eliminated by a returning Mick Foley

APRIL 26, 2004:

Horrifies St. Louis, Missouri, fans by spitting in the face of Harley Race, who is seated at ringside for a live Raw card

Photo by Mark W. Hill



Randy Orton

INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport

NOVEMBER 27, 2001:

Suffers first shoulder injury in match against Brock Lesnar

SEPTEMBER 23, 2002:

Jumps to Raw, defeating Stevie Richards in brand debut

OCTOBER 28, 2002:

In a preview of the narcissistic heel he'd soon become, Orton issues the first of several video "updates" on his physical rehabilitation at *Raw*

APRIL 25, 2002:

Upsets Hardcore Holly on *Smackdown* in WWE TV debut

OCTOBER 14, 2002:

Announces shoulder injury during interview with Jim Ross on *Raw*; blasts Montreal fans, who quickly turn on him

MARCH 17, 2003:

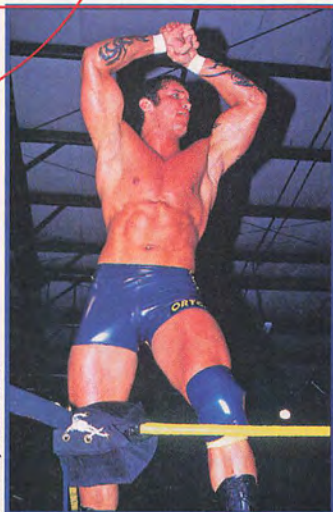
Interferes from the crowd to help Triple-H defeat Goldberg on *Raw*



Photo by Gary Dineen

wrestling timeline

Photo by Scott Romer



APRIL 1, 1980:

Born in Knoxville, Tennessee

JANUARY 15, 2001:

Signs developmental contract with WWE and is assigned to Ohio Valley Wrestling

MAY 5, 2001:

Beats Flash Flanagan to begin second OVW Hardcore title reign

MARCH 18, 2000:

Makes professional debut for MMWA-SICW in St. Louis, losing to Ace Strange

FEBRUARY 14, 2001:

Defeats Mr. Black for the OVW Hardcore championship

OCTOBER 27, 2001:

Teams with Mark Henry to defeat Rico Constantino and The Prototype (future rival John Cena)



Photo by Vern Verna



When fans are indifferent and quiet, that's when promoters need to rethink and retool. I sense a growing indifference toward the Knockouts division.

HICKS: Well I, for one, am a fan of the Knockouts. I've interviewed plenty of them and always enjoy their unique insights on the sport.

HUNTER: Yeah, I'll bet *that's* what you enjoy about hanging out with them ...

HICKS: Well, they're quite easy

on the eyes too! But I sincerely hope the Knockouts division can turn things around.

MURPHY: I think it'll happen. After all, look who's really in charge: Dixie Carter. Surely she, as a headstrong and powerful woman herself, can help the Knockouts division return to its former glory.

SAKS: It wouldn't surprise me. Then again, after 30 years of covering the wrestling business, nothing surprises me anymore. □



DON'T MISS

"THE TURN" WITH FRANK INGIOS

EXCLUSIVELY ON:
pwi-online.com

Ingiosi On Ben Roethlisberger's Raw Appearance:

"It's one thing to get the publicity you're craving, and it's something completely different to get it at the expense of your own industry's eyelash-thin credibility. Guess what, WWE: They weren't presenting Roethlisberger's appearance as a legitimate sports story. No, they were not laughing with you, they were laughing completely, totally, 100 percent at you."

Ingiosi On Hulk Hogan in TNA: "Okay, stop me if you've heard this one: Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, Jeff Hardy, Jeff Jarrett, Orlando Jordan, Scott Hall, Sean Waltman, Shannon Moore, Val Venis, Bubba the Love Sponge, and The Nasty Boys walk into a bar, which proceeds to collapse upon itself because you've actually entered the fourth level of hell."

Ingiosi On Donald Trump's "Ownership" Of Raw:

"Still, I think my favorite part is how they're literally playing up the notion that Donald Trump has been a wrestling fan his whole life. Listen, he's only as big a fan as his options allow. Were Dana White to come calling (which he wouldn't), 'The Donald' would have been a 'huge MMA' fan all of his life. Hell, if *Covergirl* called, he'd go on record as being a huge fan of makeup his whole life. He's a businessman; it's what they do."

Ingiosi on the January 4 Impact-Raw Showdown:

"WWE countered Hogan's debut with, easily, the biggest return in the company's history by having Bret Hart serve as guest host. Sure, the rest of the show was painful to watch but, hey, who expects the writers to focus on the other 80 minutes of broadcasting, right?"

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

7813/05.09

Knockouts division will never thrive if its most talented members hit the road. Perhaps they could overcome their frustrations and emerge from obscurity if they worked collectively to raise the profile of their division.

HICKS: It has happened before. Women's wrestling was almost non-existent in the early-1990s until strong, talented women such as Trish Stratus, Chyna, and Lita brought their A-game to every match. The fan base was reluctant at first ...

"Look who's really in charge: Dixie Carter. Surely she, as a headstrong and powerful woman herself, can help the Knockouts division return to its former glory."

—Dan Murphy

HUNTER: ... Perhaps memories of Fabulous Moolah and Alundra Blayze were still fresh in people's minds.

HICKS: Exactly, which is why the Divas of the '90s made such an impact. They were gorgeous, dangerous, and contemporary.

MURPHY: And today's Knockouts aren't?

HICKS: Well, today's Knockouts are essentially the same, which might be the problem. Almost without exception, they're beautiful and athletic.

HUNTER: And you're complaining?

HICKS: No, but perhaps it's time for the Knockouts to try something different. Awesome Kong stood out because she was so unique. Perhaps TNA needs to search for more women, of every variety, who truly understand the art of wrestling.

MURPHY: Let's be honest, Divas of the WWE are not exactly putting on wrestling clinics. Although some of the women in the WWE have real ring smarts, quite a few of them are just another pretty

face, so to speak.

SAKS: So you're saying that TNA's Knockouts division should focus on fostering the most talented in-ring competitors?

HICKS: I'm saying they need to do something drastic, pronto, because the division is fading into irrelevance.

HUNTER: And I'm saying they should put the division on indefinite hiatus, at least until TNA brass figures out how best to present their

core product. When it comes to the Knockouts, TNA should cut its losses and just focus on delivering what it promises: total, non-stop action.

SAKS: Could the struggles of the Knockouts division just be a sign of the times? The public appetite for women's wrestling has ebbed and waned over the years.

HUNTER: Wrestling is a fan-driven sport. As long as fans are cheering or booing, all is well.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Lacey Von Erich (above) and Velvet Sky (opposite) are beautiful people to be sure, but they are still young and learning their way inside the ring. The Knockouts division needs them to succeed, but it also needs the type of woman you wouldn't bring home to Mama—because you wouldn't want Mama to get beaten up!



Awesome Kong continually squabbled with management over money, but it was a physical altercation with Bubba the Love Sponge that led to her parting ways with TNA. It's that same toughness that AK showed against BTLS that is now sorely missing in the division.

HUNTER: Well, I told you. I just don't watch women's wrestling anymore. When I watch wrestling, I want to see some tough, athletic dudes battle it out, not surgically enhanced models pulling each other's hair. So sue me.

HICKS: You're over-generalizing. Look at females like Tara, Gail Kim, Traci Brooks, ODB, Awesome Kong—they're all hugely talented ring warriors, regardless of gender.

MURPHY: But where are they now? Either retired, jumped ship, or recently let go by TNA.

SAKS: And therein lies the crux of the debate. The Knockouts division seems a little, well, knocked out. The talent pool seems quite shallow compared to just a few years ago.

HUNTER: Even I can see that, and I barely pay attention. I con-

fess that when Awesome Kong was on TV, I didn't change channels. To be honest, I thought she was TNA's greatest asset for a while. Totally original, intimidating, and impressive.

MURPHY: Then a clash of personalities between her and Bubba the Love Sponge put an end to her tenure.

HICKS: Which leads to a bigger issue. Bubba the Love Sponge was one of the many newcomers to TNA who seemed to follow on the heels of Hulk Hogan. From what I can tell, the Hogan/Bischoff regime is more focused on promoting the old boys' club than highlighting the Knockouts.

SAKS: There's no doubt that Hogan's arrival bought about a paradigm shift in TNA's booking strategies. Is "The Hulkster" anti-Knockouts?

MURPHY: I think that's a bit presumptuous. Tara reportedly quit over failed salary negotiations. Gail Kim saw greener pastures in WWE, though she is now chronically underused.

HICKS: But the list goes on. ODB—gone. Raisha Saeed—gone. Sojourner Bolt—gone. These are all talented women, now all plying their trade on the indy circuit.

SAKS: So what's causing this exodus of female talent from the Knockouts division?

HUNTER: My guess is frustration. TNA has been in such flux lately, with the ever-changing time slots, the WCW-reminiscent booking, the revolving-door roster. Perhaps the Knockouts feel like they'll get lost in the shuffle if they stick around, so they're trying their luck elsewhere.

MURPHY: But it's a catch-22. The

Has The Knockout Division Lost Its Credibility?

"When I watch wrestling, I want to see some tough, athletic dudes battle it out, not surgically enhanced models pulling each other's hair."

—Liz Hunter

IT'S SAID THAT the popularity of professional wrestling is cyclical—it booms when it serves as a microcosm of society at large, and busts when it fails to tap into the social psyche. This is doubly true of women's wrestling, a subgenre that sometimes spells ratings gold, but at

other times wanes into complete obscurity.

Women's wrestling now seems to be at a crossroads once again, particularly in TNA, where the Knockouts division is teetering between "hot" and "forgot." The once-sizzling division now has been expunged of many of its most talented performers, and those remaining find themselves vying for ever-smaller parcels of airtime.

Curious about what the future holds for the Knockouts division, Publisher Stu Saks summoned writers Brady Hicks, Liz Hunter, and Dan Murphy to the **PWI** boardroom for a roundtable discussion.

STU SAKS: Pop quiz, guys: Who is the current TNA Knockouts champion?

LIZ HUNTER: I'm stumped. Honestly, when women's matches come on, that's when I flip the channels.

BRADY HICKS: I know this one. It's Roxxi, right?

DAN MURPHY: Nope, Roxxi lost to Madison Rayne, so she's the champ. At least last time I checked. Right, Stu?

SAKS: It doesn't really matter who's right. What matters is that none of you guys really knew the answer.

HUNTER: Proving what, exactly?

SAKS: Proving the view of several pundits: that the Knockouts division is on a slippery slope toward irrelevance. None of you guys would have had any problems telling me who's the TNA World champion, or the X division champion. But you guessed and waffled about the Knockouts champ. Why is that?



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ODB might march to the beat of her own drummer, but she was a talented and feared competitor and a major component of the Knockouts division when it reached its apex. ODB's recent resignation dealt a major blow to what had been one of TNA's major bright spots.

being what it is, and having seen firsthand both on our own shores and overseas what our military does, I've really grown to admire them and try to honor them in any way I can. I'm proud to try to represent for them. To me, they're the real heroes.



Photo by George Napolitano

Much of Cena's recent success has come against Batista, who has openly complained about Cena's elevated status in WWE.

Q: Let's talk about your feud with Sheamus. He has already won a pair of WWE championships at your expense, albeit by questionable means. What is that makes him such a tough opponent, and what do you have to do to prevail?

A: I got to give him credit for this much: Sheamus is big and tough as nails. He's methodical and relentless. He can absorb a lot of punishment and dish out even more. In a lot of ways, he reminds me of Triple-H, although Triple-H obviously has the benefit of more experience and the savvy that comes with it. Sheamus is also completely ruthless. In terms of beating him in the ring, I'm one of the few guys who can match power with him, plus I've usually had success against other

big guys. I've been around long enough to take a few losses in stride. In other words, losing a few battles but winning the war.

Q: You have consistently been a target in WWE. That includes not only established stars like Batista, but many of the younger wrestlers, such as the NXT graduates or, before them, The Spirit Squad. Has it gotten to the point that it's something you expect, or does it become frustrating that you have to have eyes in the back of your head, even when your match is over?

A: I expect it, and understand it. I did the same thing when I was younger. Everyone wants to make a name and reputation for themselves, and the guys at the top are always going to be the ones who get challenged. So I don't take it personally. But I will say this: Anyone who wants a piece of John Cena had better be ready for what me and the CeNation have to throw back at them. I've never been afraid to get down and dirty when I need to.

Q: Even though the now-released Bryan Danielson was among the NXT alumni who attacked you—and Danielson went so far as to spit on you—you publicly came to his defense when WWE let him go. Why?

A: I'm always going to be someone who speaks his mind. Like I said a few minutes ago, I don't take it personally when guys try to make a name for themselves by targeting me. Second, and more important, my comments weren't really about Bryan himself so much as saying that the fans are the ones with the ultimate power in this business. If they want to see someone in WWE, be vocal about it and get organized, because it's good business to give the people what they want if the demand is high enough.

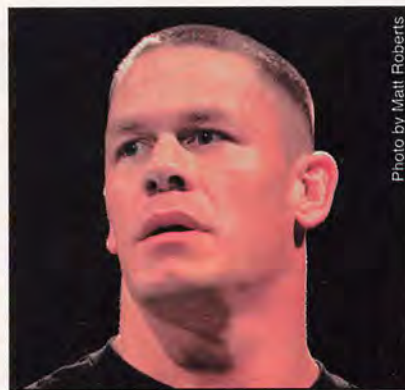
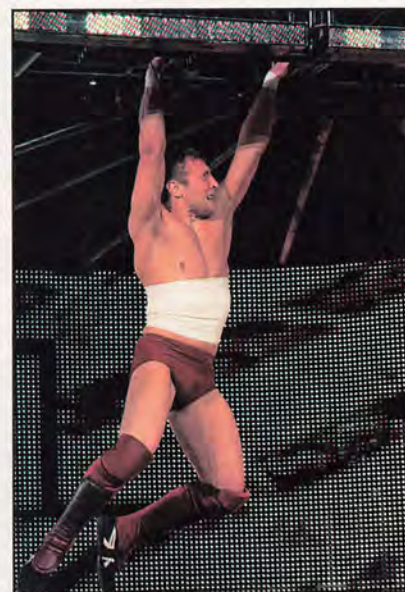


Photo by Matt Roberts

"Anyone who wants a piece of John Cena had better be ready for what me and the CeNation have to throw back at them."

Q: Is there anyone in this business whom you've never wrestled against or teamed with that you would especially like to step into ring with?

A: In a fantasy world, it would be cool to get in the ring with some of the all-time legends from the U.S., Canada, Japan, and Mexico when they were in their prime. In the real world, I'd never say never to wrestling anyone. It doesn't matter where or who it is, if the fans want to see it, I'll be there for them. □



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Despite the brutal attack administered to Cena by Bryan Danielson and Nexus on *Raw*, Cena was quite outspoken about WWE's decision to release the former indy standout.

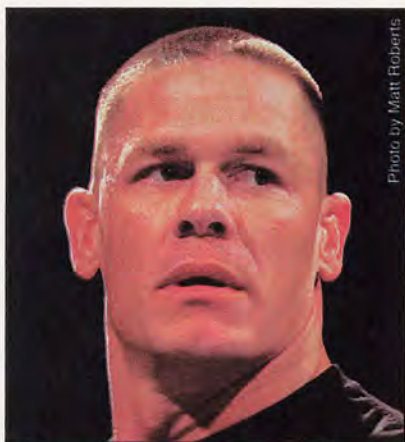


Photo by Matt Roberts

"I can honestly tell you that I appreciate every single fan, young and old, who pays their hard-earned money to be entertained by us."

you do whatever you can, in and out of the ring, to touch as many people's lives as possible. You meet as many fans as possible, go to the hospitals and clinics, show our military men and women how much we appreciate them. You stay in the best shape possible so you can be your best in the ring even if you are feeling less than 100 percent. You represent the business and talk not only about the matches and pay-

per-views, but also to make people aware of the positive things about our business. It all goes with the territory.

Q: Even by WWE standards, you are known to take on an exceptionally busy schedule. Do you ever fear that you are stretching yourself too thin?

A: No. Here's how I see it. I need to give back to the CeNation and WWE Universe that have enabled me to make a great living by supporting me and this business through thick and thin. I know some people are gonna roll their eyes at me saying that, and that's okay. But I can honestly tell you that I appreciate every single fan, young and old, who pays their hard-earned money to be entertained by us.

Q: Even the vocal contingent of fans who boo you, criticize your image, and malign your abilities in the ring?

A: Definitely those fans, too. I respect the fact that they are at least passionate about the business. Those fans help to keep



Photo by Stu Saks

Though he's had some strong moments against Sheamus, Cena has mostly come out on the wrong end in their matches. However, "The Champ" says he's willing to lose a few battles to win the war.

me grounded. I'm totally cool with knowing that you can't possibly please all the people all the time. Besides, I believe that you are doing your job as long as people care about you. Whether it's to cheer or boo is up to them. It's when they are quiet and just kind of shrug that you have to worry.

Q: Ever since promoting your starring role in *The Marine*, you have gradually toned down your hip-hop image in favor of more of a self-styled action hero persona with hints of military influence, such as saluting the fans, wearing dog tags, and, sometimes, sporting camouflage shorts instead of jeans. Has that been a deliberate change?

A: I would call it more of a natural evolution than something planned or calculated. I've always tried to be true to myself in and out of the ring. I still enjoy hip hop, and I'm proud of the *You Can't See Me* song and album, which is why I still use it as my theme. Rap is still part of me, and I still incorporate it. But with my wrestling schedule

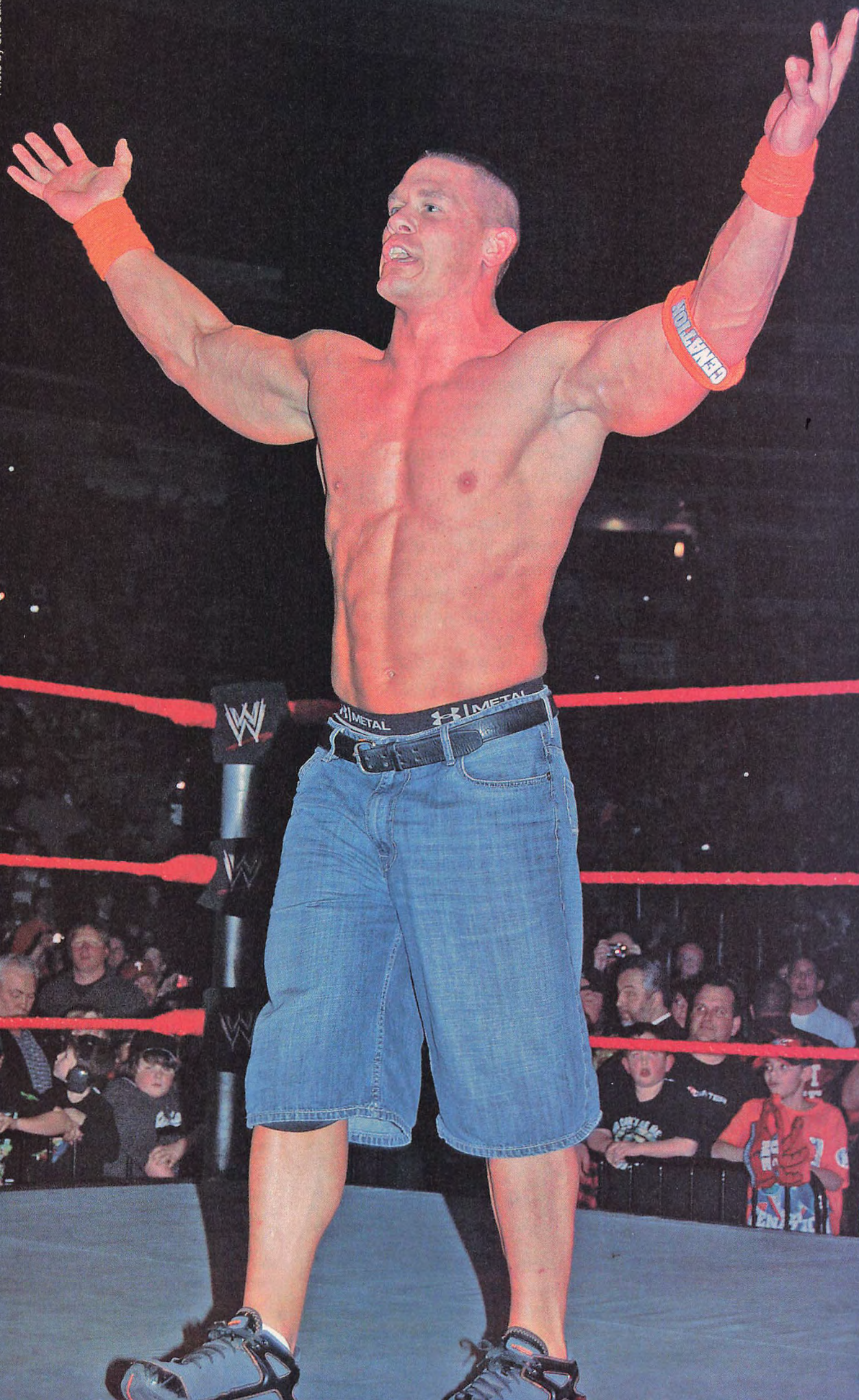


Photo courtesy of The Gillette Company



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As champion or contender, Cena takes his role as WWE representative very seriously, whether that entails visiting soldiers (left) or making media appearances (right).



John Cena

"I'm totally cool with knowing that you can't possibly please all the people all the time."

WHETHER YOU ARE a proud member of his CeNation or would sooner support Attila the Hun, there is no denying that John Cena has become the profession's most ubiquitous superstar over the past half-decade. He has either held one of the WWE's two world titles or been the top contender for the majority of the past of five years.

It is the rare major pay-per-view event that does not feature Cena as one of the headliners. His merchandise is everywhere and he remains WWE's most sought-after personality for mainstream television and radio interviews and public appearances. At age 33, he is in the prime of his career and is likely to continue reigning at or near the top of the profession for the foreseeable future.

Cena's stature in WWE, along with his out-of-the-ring celebrity, has made him a frequent target for both established and up-and-coming wrestlers. One of the most persistent thorns in Cena's side over the past year has been Sheamus. The big Irishman has engaged Cena in a pair of feuds and fared surprisingly well. However, Cena ultimately prevailed in the first installment of the rivalry, and remains the favorite to come out ahead when the dust settles this time around. When all is said and done, Cena is usually the one to emerge victorious.

Cena recently took time to



"I've been around long enough to take a few losses in stride. In other words, losing a few battles but winning the war."

grant an interview to contributing writer Bill Meltzer. "The Champ" pulled no punches in discussing his views on what it takes to be a long-reigning champion, his opinion of Sheamus and other rivals, his obligations to the fans, dealing with the Nexus, and more.

Q: John, I don't think many fans realize that, through your first seven WWE World championship reigns, you already rank fifth all-time in terms of combined time as holder of that version of the world title. Only Bruno Sammartino, Hulk Hogan, Bob Backlund, and Pedro Morales had longer com-

bined reigns. If you add in your two heavyweight championship reigns to date, you have already surpassed 1,000 days with one of the world championship belts in WWE. My question to you is how much do title belts mean to you at this phase of your career. Are they still your biggest motivator?

A: First of all, I need to give props to the guys you just mentioned. They are the all-time greats in this sport, and it's an honor just to have my name mentioned in the same breath as theirs. As far as being a motivator, absolutely it is. Having a world championship belt means that you are at the top of the business, and that carries a lot of responsibilities along with all the perks. You have to be ready to represent, and that means the world to me. Even when you lose and someone else has the title, there are obligations if you consider yourself worthy of another run as champ.

Q: I think most people know what you are saying, but could you clarify what's involved in the responsibilities you described?

A: Well, first and foremost, it means that you have to be accessible to the people who make all this possible—the fans. Without them, we don't have a business. That means

Instead, fans got nothing but a *Raw* tease.

"Oh, I thought we were going to see something big develop after that *Raw* match," said longtime WWE fan Margie Masula, 23, of Roanoke, Virginia. "The next day I went to the WWE website looking for a big headline with their two names in it, and I was shocked to see nothing. I even called a couple of friends to see what they thought, and they agree with me: We want more!"

While Christian certainly strives to please his "Peeps," locking horns with Edge would do more than merely satiate his fans' thirst for nostalgia; it would measurably boost his profile and star power in WWE. Currently, Edge is one of WWE's top guys. He's been in the main-event picture since he won the inaugural Money in the Bank ladder match at WrestleMania 21, he is a nine-time world champion, 14-time tag champion, and the 2010 Royal Rumble winner. Whether he's embroiled in a personal feud or merely chasing another world championship, Edge is never more than a hair's breadth away from a pay-per-view main event. A high-profile feud with one of WWE's most recognizable superstars could deliver Christian from the mid-card purgatory of the company's B-show.

No doubt, Christian would benefit more than Edge from the attention a feud would garner, but that doesn't mean Edge wouldn't accept the challenge.

To the contrary. "Hey, I got no problem facing off with Christian," the "Rated-R Superstar" told THE WRESTLER. "Yeah, we have a back-and-forth history, but if he wants to try me on for size, I'm not going anywhere. I'd be only too happy to show everybody who the dominant wrestler of our

team was for all those years."

"He wants no part of me," countered Christian. "He has the pull to force the issue. Have you seen him use it? Yeah, I got the one match, but that was more or less a scheduling fluke. I'll give him this much: He knows he has far more to lose than me in a protracted feud right now."

But Edge, too, would have plenty to gain from a fall fling with his fellow Canadian. At press time, Sheamus was WWE champion, and with a glut of top-level heels on Raw (including Chris Jericho, emerging stars The Miz and Ted DiBiase Jr., and now the Nexus wrestlers), Edge runs the risk of getting lost in the shuffle. Targeting Christian and moving to Smackdown, where former flame Vickie Guerrero still resides, would keep Edge hot and relevant.

"Coming to Smackdown and going after Christian, rather than the World champion, whomever that may be, might seem like a lateral step for Edge," said *Smackdown* commentator Todd Grisham. "But when you stop and think of how emotional a Christian-Edge feud would be, it seems like a winner for everybody—including the fans."

Both Christian and Edge have a significant emotional investment in one another. That's the key ingredient for a Feud of the Year candidate. Perhaps, in the backs of their minds, Edge and Christian feel that their history can't go away and that a feud between them can be put off while more pressing matters are addressed.

But ask Ms. Masula and her friends, who probably speak for the entire WWE Universe. "There no need to put it off any longer," she said. "The time to do it is now!"

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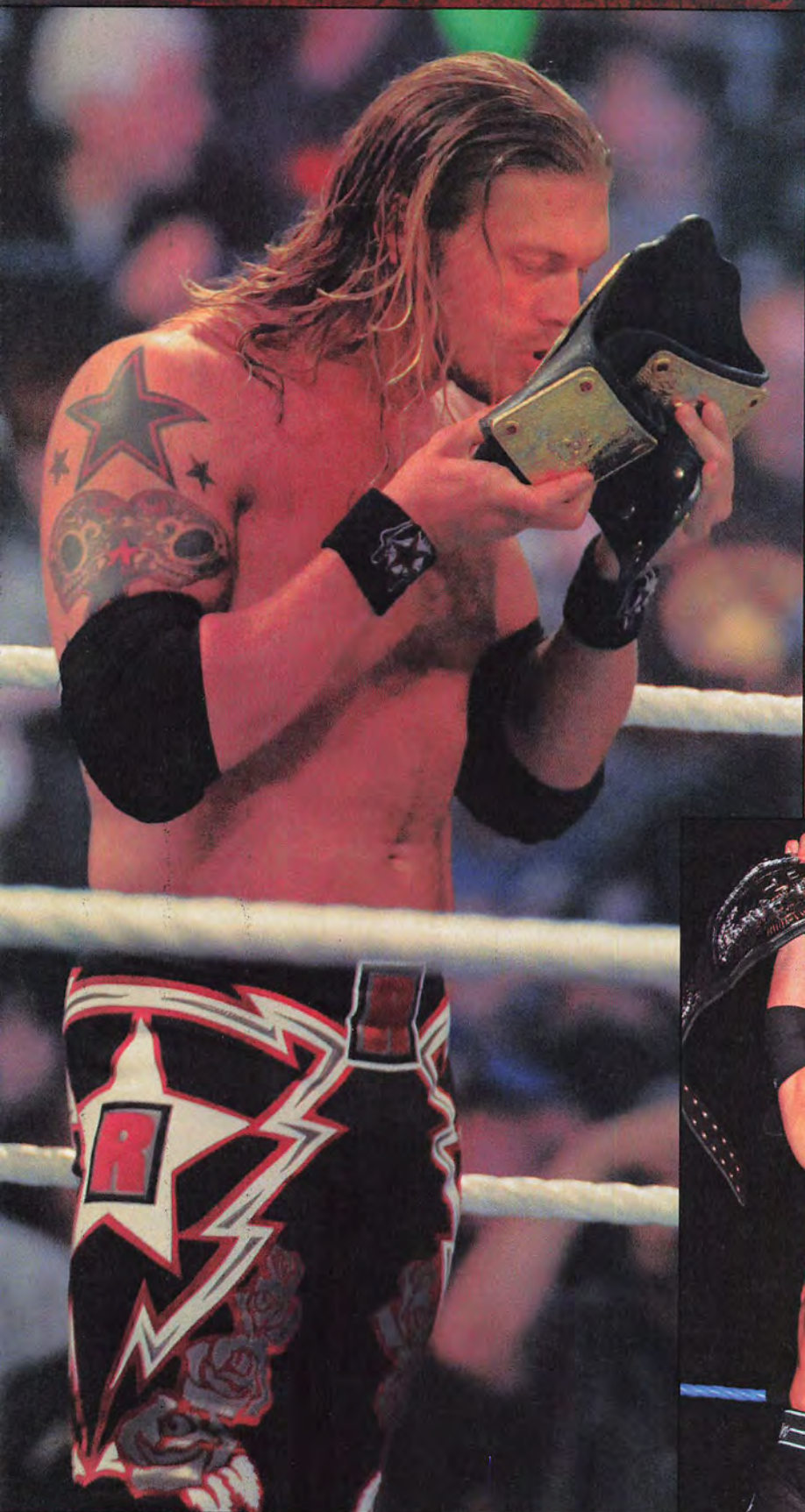


Photo by George Napolitano

This is what the WWE Universe has been waiting for!

But nothing. No follow-up. No feud.

Since 2001, the careers of both men have traveled divergent paths. Edge went on to become a nine-time world champ, while Christian held the NWA heavyweight championship in TNA before returning to WWE in 2009. Upon his return, the rumor mill jumped into high gear. Many fans were certain that Christian was behind Jeff Hardy's well-publicized misfortunes, and they were hoping for Christian to leave ECW and jump to Smackdown to challenge (or side with) then-WWE World champion Edge. Then, when Edge returned from injury as a fan favorite at the 2010 Royal Rumble and ECW was disbanded shortly thereafter, a reunion once again seemed imminent.

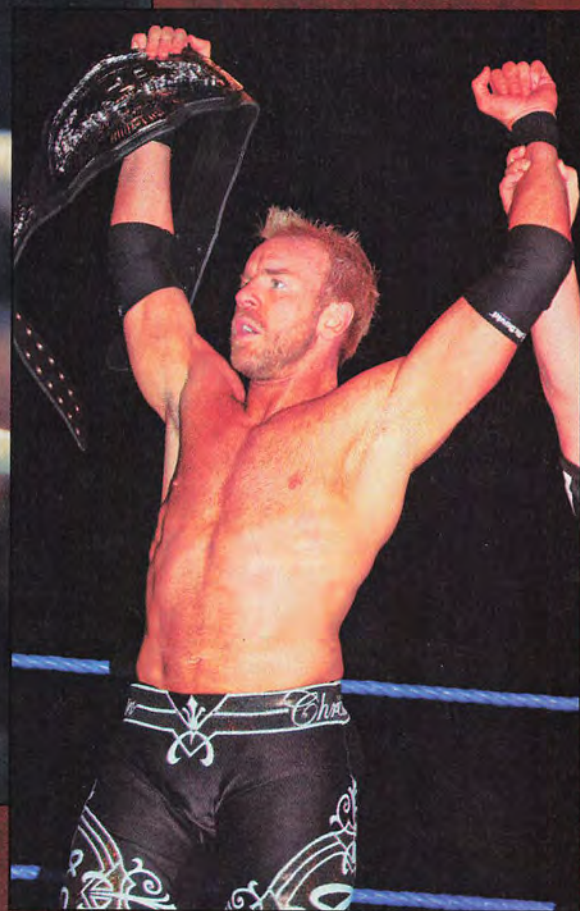


Photo by Steve Beyer

The highlight of Christian's WWE singles career was capturing the ECW championship from Jack Swagger in April 2009 (right). Edge, on the other hand, is a nine-time world champion (above). Christian's jealousy is a good jump-off point for a new feud.

Edge and Christian were inseparable from their early days in the sport (below) and proudly made up the fib that they were brothers. Their falling out (right) was a sad time in their lives, but it was certainly thrilling for the fans.



Before fate set them on different courses nine years ago, the careers of Edge and Christian were closely intertwined. Today it's in both of their best interest to reunite ...on opposite sides of the ring!

By Louie Dee

O H, WHAT A tease. All the makings for a Christian vs. Edge feud were in place. In April on *Raw*, they had their first match since Christian's return from TNA. Very hard fought. Very intense. Edge won the back-and-forth struggle but had to face The Undertaker immediately after. Exhausted from the grueling match with Christian, Edge opted to bail and take the countout loss. But Christian forced him back into the ring where he was choke-slammed by "The Dead Man."

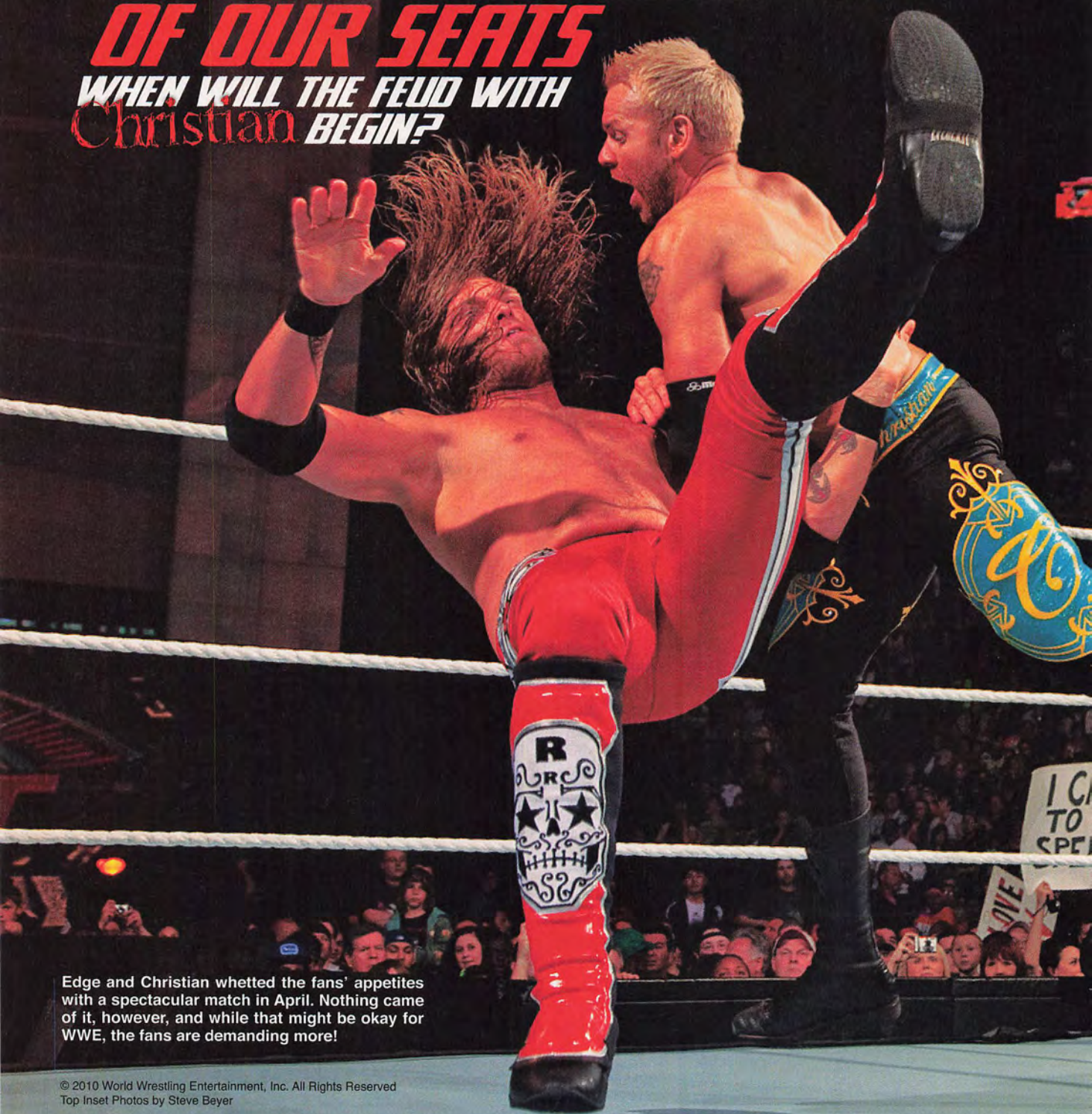
Edge was livid at his former running mate. It was 2001 all over again. The two men who had come up together through the independent ranks and had captured seven World tag team titles in WWE were at a point back then where they couldn't stand the sight of one another. They had gone from third runner-up for *PWI's* Tag Team of the Year award in 2000 to third runner-up for Feud of the Year 365 days later. And now, nine years later, they were feeling emotions that had lay dormant for the better part of the decade.





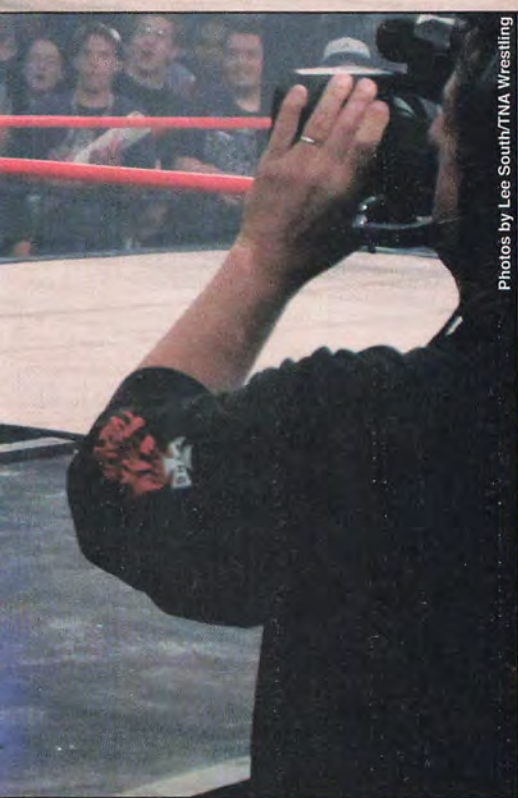
ON THE **EDGE** OF OUR SEATS

WHEN WILL THE FEUD WITH
Christian BEGIN?



Edge and Christian whetted the fans' appetites with a spectacular match in April. Nothing came of it, however, and while that might be okay for WWE, the fans are demanding more!

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Top Inset Photos by Steve Beyer



Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

AJ Styles knew that his World title was in jeopardy as soon as RVD came upon the scene. These two men's styles match up perfectly and it would not be surprising to see the title belt exchanged between them on a frequent basis.

matches, but he was expected to be a corporate ambassador for the company, which was a role RVD was uncomfortable playing.

In TNA, he can be a part of an ensemble cast that includes AJ Styles, Kurt Angle, Jeff Hardy, Hulk Hogan, and Mr. Anderson. He doesn't need to carry the promotion on his back, or change his personality to suit his corporate overlords.

He also has the opportunity to compete in more intimate venues. RVD became a star by wowing groups of 1,000 or so fans at ECW cards. He was able to connect with those fans on a deep level, much like a band playing at a smaller venue, as

opposed to an arena. The fans in TNA's Impact Zone treat him like a star, and he's feeding off that energy.

On top of that, TNA fans are conditioned to appreciate innovative and athletic offense. Van Dam can go move-for-move with any X division competitor, but he also has the strength of a heavyweight.

In short, TNA is a great fit for Rob Van Dam ... and Rob Van Dam is a great fit for TNA.

"It's a good business decision for me right now," Van Dam said. "It's been a great feeling wrestling in front of these fans and I'm ready to do more as TNA World champion." □



lot of my passion I had for wrestling. I want the company I work for to succeed."

Van Dam is known for being laid-back and low-key, but there is no mistaking his enthusiasm for his current situation. He has become the flagbearer for TNA and is in a position to deliver the five-star matches he delivered during his runs in ECW and WWE. And even though he wrestles a high-risk, high-impact style, his sabbatical has given him time to rest up any nagging injuries. He may be pushing 40 years old, but he moves with the speed and agility of a man 15 years younger. In fact, Van Dam experienced little "ring rust" when he joined TNA, which he attributes to his rigorous training regimen.

"I never changed my workout routine during those three years," Van Dam said. "I was still wrestling overseas three or four times a year. That helped me keep on top of my wrestling game. I've got a gym in my house, so I was working out regularly. One of my favorite things to do in California is to ride my bike around, so I do that a lot. I work the heavybag, jump rope, do the elliptical. And one of the most important things I do is my stretch routine, which keeps me limber and flexible. When I came to TNA, I was in ring shape, had my cardio, and was ready to go."

In many ways, Van Dam has an ideal situation in TNA. During his time in the original ECW in the 1990s, Van Dam was under pressure to be ECW's breakout star. In many ways, the long-term viability of ECW as a promotion was tied to him. During his WWE run, Van Dam was under pressure to succeed The Rock and Steve Austin and become one of WWE's franchise players. Not only was he expected to win

SVD: "I'm Very Happy To Be Healthy"

In 2008, Rob Van Dam and his wife, Sonya, were struck with devastating news. Just a few weeks shy of her 33rd birthday, Sonya was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer.

One of the main reasons for Van Dam's wrestling sabbatical was so that he could spend more time with his wife as she faced this frightening ordeal. We are happy to report that Sonya's cancer is now in remission.

"I feel great," Sonya told us. "I'm very happy to be healthy."

Sonya said her diagnosis was a life-changing event.

"You can't go through something like that and not have it change you," she said. "You realize that you can't take things for granted, and you develop a different attitude. You can't let the small things bother you anymore."

Sonya has gone back to school and is studying photography, something she admits she probably would not have done had she not had her brush with cancer.

"It was something I had always wanted to do, but I always thought I would get to it *someday*," Sonya said. "When I was diagnosed with cancer, I realized that you're not guaranteed a someday. You're not guaranteed a tomorrow. You have to take every opportunity you are given. I would rather do something and fail than never tried it at all."

Sonya has joined the Family Patient Advisory Board of the City of Hope Cancer Institute outside of Los Angeles. She works with newly diagnosed patients to ease their transition into treatment and helps patients and families cope with a diagnosis of cancer.

So ... how does Sonya feel about her husband going back to a more hectic wrestling schedule with TNA?

"I am excited for him," she said. "Rob's an artist. He uses his body in a physical way for his art. It's awesome having him be able to do his thing in front of his fans. He's been wrestling overseas, but there's a different reaction when he's wrestling in front of his countrymen—it's a much louder, heartfelt reaction. I love to hear the fans here root for him. It makes me happy, and it makes him happy."

—Dan Murphy



Rob & Sonya: Enjoying health and happiness

Van Dam's frame of mind was totally different when he won the WWE World belt in 2006 (right) than when he won the TNA World belt in 2010 (below). In both cases, though, it pleased RVD to celebrate his accomplishments with men he worked with in ECW, Paul Heyman and Team 3-D, respectively.



Photo by George Napolitano

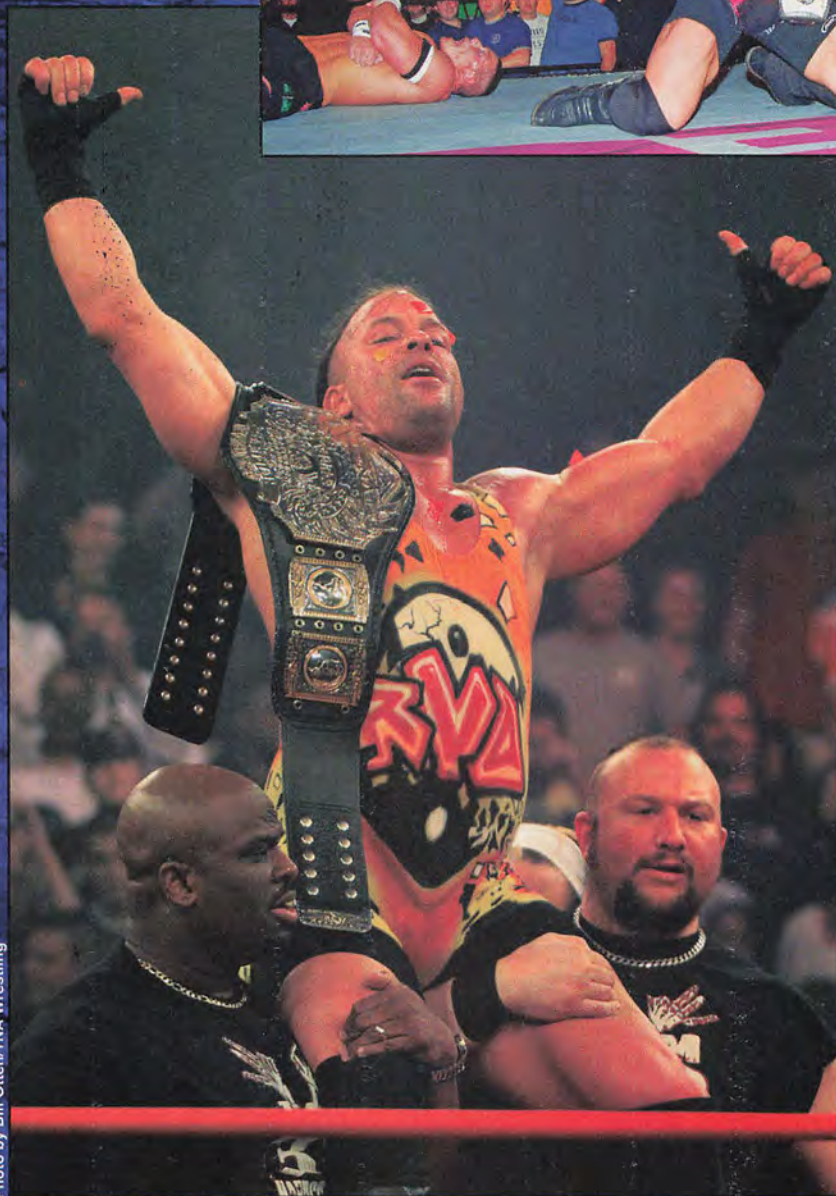


Photo by Bill Otten/TNA Wrestling

In June 2007, barely one year after he had defeated John Cena to win the WWE championship, Van Dam said *sayonara* to WWE. He made a couple of surprise, one-night-only return appearances in WWE, at *Raw*'s 15th anni-

versary special and at the 2009 Royal Rumble. Yet despite receiving deafening ovations on both occasions, Van Dam never made a full-fledged return. He made periodic tours overseas, but it seemed as if his days wrestling stateside had come

to an end.

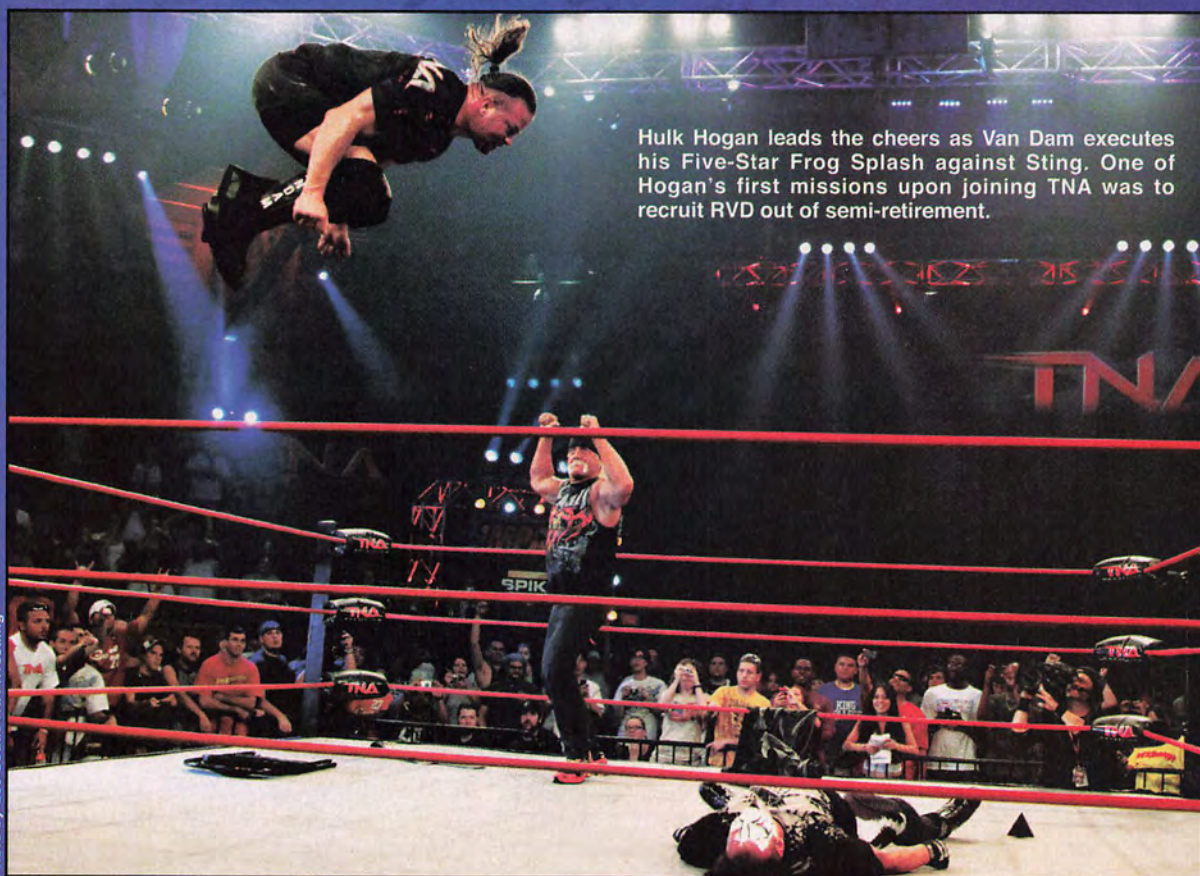
On March 8, RVD debuted in TNA. Just five weeks later, the semi-retired former "Mr. Monday Night" was wearing the TNA World championship belt. Van Dam has a new championship and TNA has a unique champion: a 20-year veteran still in his athletic prime. He has experience. He is rested and healthy. He has a championship pedigree. He has mass appeal.

And he is having fun again.

"The time away from wrestling definitely added longevity to my career," Van Dam told *INSIDE WRESTLING*. "When I chose to walk away, I was burnt out. I didn't care to ever step into the ring again. I was ready to focus on other things. The break didn't lower my standing or my value. It increased it. It made the demand for Rob Van Dam stronger. It secured my place as one of the top guys."

Van Dam said he appreciates his role as TNA World champion, and that the atmosphere in TNA is quite different from the atmosphere in WWE.

"It's really good here. It's a great gig," he said. "TNA is a great place to work. Unlike WWE, which was ruled by fear, TNA is ruled by team spirit. Coming here rejuvenated a



Hulk Hogan leads the cheers as Van Dam executes his Five-Star Frog Splash against Sting. One of Hogan's first missions upon joining TNA was to recruit RVD out of semi-retirement.

HOT DAM!

By Dan Murphy

AFTER 20 YEARS, **RVD** IS BETTER THAN EVER

THERE WAS A time in the not-so-distant past when Rob Van Dam was ready to walk away from wrestling for good.

The corporate sensibilities of WWE—and all the political landmines that go along with them—had robbed him of his passion. Wrestling simply wasn't fun anymore, and the man who had thrilled fans while climbing to the top of both ECW and WWE was ready to pursue interests outside the squared circle.

Three years ago, Rob Van Dam walked away from wrestling content with the thought that he may never perform full-time again. Now rested physically and mentally, he's the top man in TNA and loving every minute



Scott Steiner, Christopher-Michinoku.

Aug. 1998: WrestleMania XIV: The Real Winners And Losers. Also: Sunny, Curt Hennig, Dan Severn, Ultimo Dragon.

Sept. 1998: Power Surge! While The NWO Fiddles ... These Men Are Burning. Also: Sable, Ultimo-Guerrero, DeGeneration X-Owen, Rocky Maivia, Mad Russian-Rambo.

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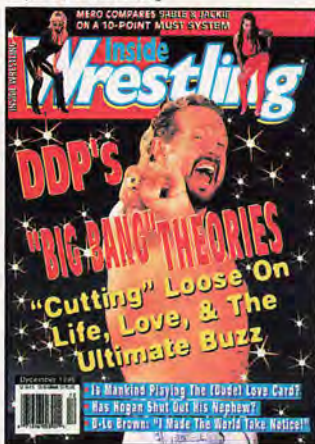
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Holiday 1996 (Special Issue): The Tombstone: Wrestling's Deadliest Finisher. Also: 1997 calendar, "Psycho" Sid, Benoit-Misterio, Steiners-NWO, Pit Bull I, Justin Liger.

June 1997: Ahmed Johnson Reveals: "I Almost Joined The Nation Of Domination." Also: Mankind, Lex Luger, NWO, Davey Boy Smith, Jerry Graham.

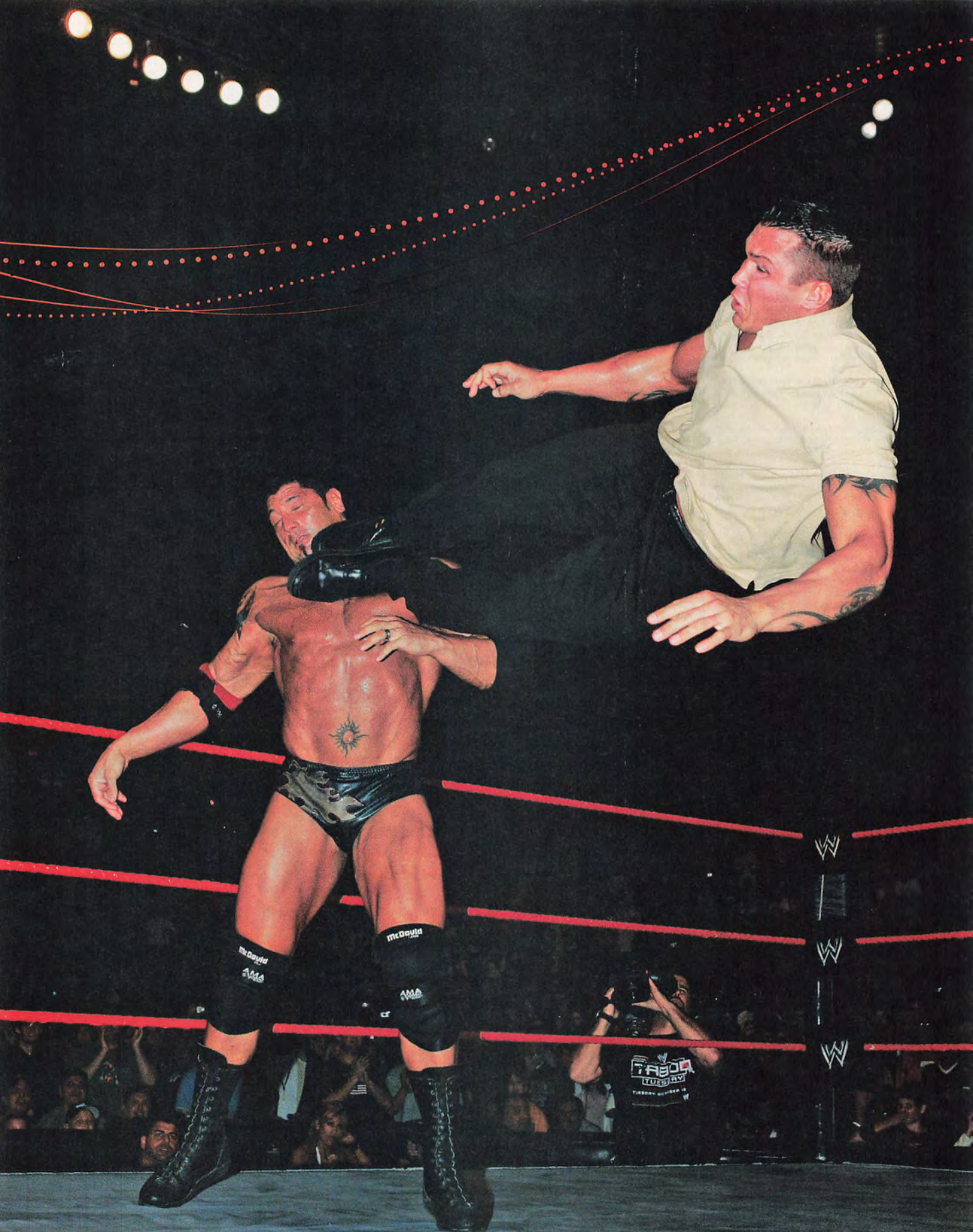
Holiday 1997 (Special Issue): The Steiners' Million-Dollar Gambel! Also: 1998 calendar, Austin Wright, The Patriot, Sgt. Slaughter, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.

April 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament. Also: Scott Hall, Marlena, Chris Benoit, Gunn & James, Sabu-Sandman.

May 1998: Is The WWF Screwing Another Hart? Also: Steve Austin, Dallas Page, Booker T, Larry Zbyszko, Al Snow.

June 1998: Exclusive! Steve Austin: The 10 Men Who Inspired His Toughness. Also: Dusty & Dustin, Perry Saturn, Mortis, Jeff Jarrett.

July 1998 (Special Issue): Top Stars Answer Your Personal Questions. Also: Jericho-Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Sunny,



Best Photo In Our Files:
Randy Orton vs. Batista 2001

The BEST OF

Randy Orton

Best Match:

April 18, 2004: vs. Cactus Jack. Orton not only retained his Intercontinental title belt, he defeated the hardcore legend at his own hardcore game.

Best Opponent:

The Undertaker. When Superstar Billy Graham encouraged Orton to do something no one had done before, it was The Undertaker he called out in an attempt to prove his worth and confidence as a singles star.

Best Year:

2009.

Best Accomplishment:

Orton did what many thought he couldn't by defeating Chris Benoit in Canada to become the youngest world champion in history. He retained the title against Benoit the following night on *Raw*.

Best Arena:

Rosemont, Illinois' Allstate Arena. Though he failed to capture the World title here at WrestleMania 22, Orton had his day the following year at No Mercy when he was awarded the belt at the beginning of No Mercy. Triple-H defeated Orton in the opening match, but Orton went on to defeat him later that night in a Last-Man-Standing match.

Best Move:

RKO. When "The Viper" is ready to finish off an opponent, the trusted RKO makes it quick and, well, not exactly painless.

Best Partner:

Edge. Edge and Orton formed an alliance known as Rated RKO in October 2006. They defeated Roddy Piper and Ric Flair a month later for the World tag team title and retained it against D-Generation X before dropping the belts to Cena and Michaels.

Best Female Associate:

Stacy Keibler. As Orton made his transition from babyface to heel, he began an on-screen relationship with the leggy fan favorite in 2005. Orton established himself as a full-on heel when he RKO'd Keibler on the March 21, 2005, episode of *Raw*.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

After overcoming some behavioral issues a few years back, Orton has proven there is such a thing as second chances in wrestling.



Best Photo In Our Files:

Jeff Hardy vs. Edge 2000

Photo by John S. Pithers

The BEST OF

Jeff Hardy

Best Match:

June 7, 2009: vs. Edge. After winning the WWE title from his longtime rival six months earlier, Hardy faced Edge again at Extreme Rules in a ladder match for the World title. After a brutal back and forth, Hardy was able to scale the ladder and obtain the gold.

Best Opponent:

Edge. When Matt and Jeff Hardy feuded with Edge and Christian early in their WWF careers, all four competitors established themselves as future main-eventers. And when Jeff finally got his big push, it was Edge he defeated at Armageddon in 2008 to win the WWE title, and at Extreme Rules six months later for the World title.

Best Year:

2009.

Best Accomplishment:

Hardy had his three biggest title victories to date in a span of seven months. He won the WWE title in December 2008 and the World title in June and July of 2009. Few wrestlers have packed so much success into such a short amount of time.

Best Arena:

Raleigh, North Carolina's RBC Center. This facility played host to the first Tables, Ladders, and Chairs tag team match at SummerSlam in 2000. Though the Hardys failed to capture the title, their performance in front of a hometown crowd helped establish Matt and Jeff as fearless daredevil talents.

Best Move:

Swanton Bomb. This swan dive forward flip off the top turnbuckle is highly effective when he hits it, but self-destructive when it goes wrong.

Best Partner:

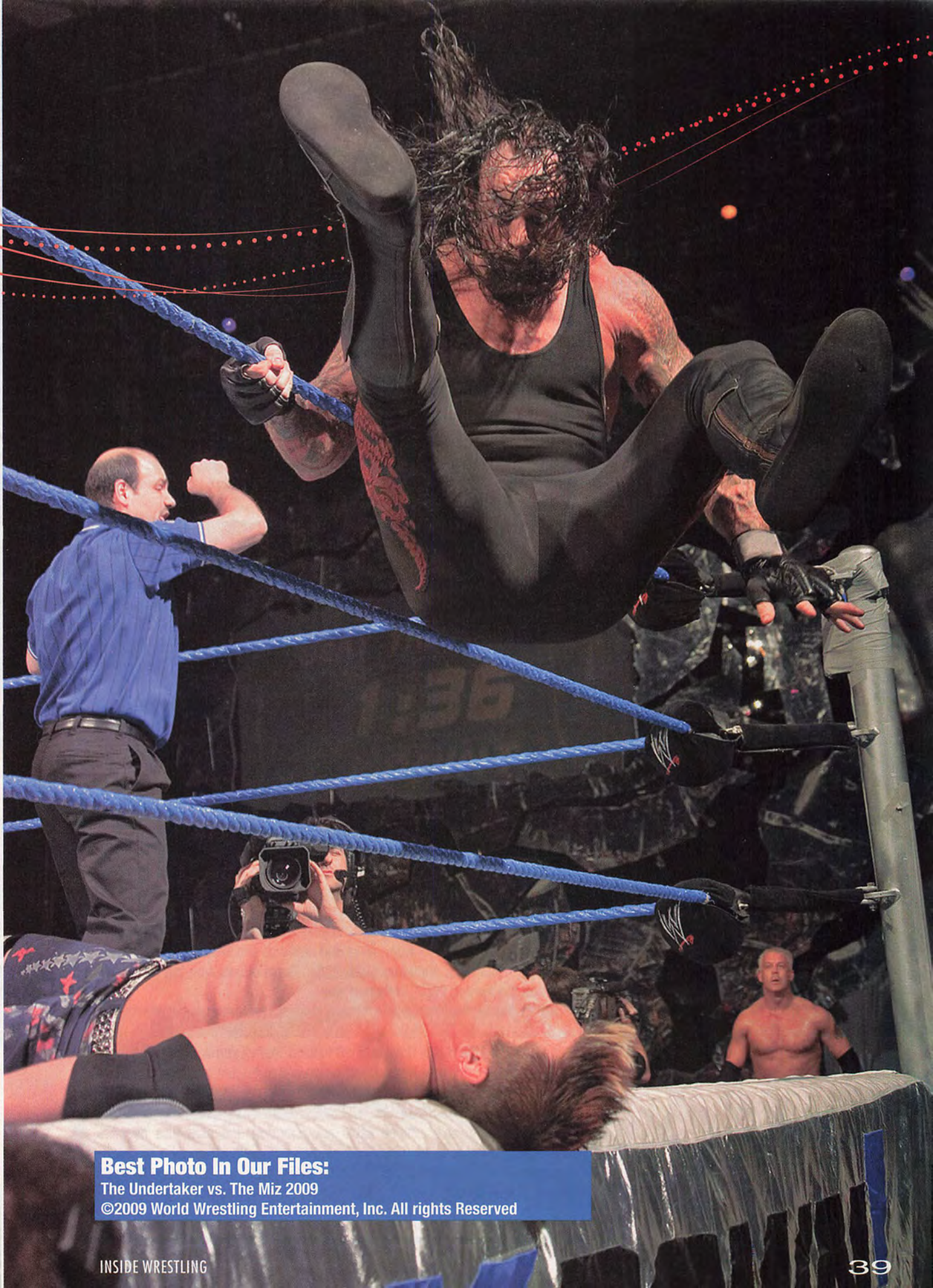
Matt Hardy. As the Hardy Boyz, Matt and Jeff won the WWF belts five times, and WCW belts once, between 1999-2001. The brothers won tag team gold again on the April 2, 2007, edition of *Raw*.

Best Female Associate:

Lita. Lita joined the Hardy Boys in 2000 to form Team Xtreme. Serving as more than a manager, her presence was often crucial to the team's success.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

Hardy's acrobatic style helped set a new standard for what was possible in the ring, both as a tag team and singles competitor. Although his high-risk maneuvers sometimes put him in harm's way, they also helped him win scores of new fans.



Best Photo In Our Files:

The Undertaker vs. The Miz 2009

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The Best Of

The Undertaker

Best Match:

June 28, 1998: vs. Mankind. During a legendary Hell in a Cell match at King of the Ring, The Undertaker made quick work of Mankind, tossing him from the top of the cell through an announce table, choke-slammng him through the top of the cage, then hitting a Tombstone piledriver for the win.

Best Opponent:

Shawn Michaels. Having never defeated Michaels in singles competition, The Undertaker finally got the job done at WrestleMania 25 in 2009's *PWI* Match of the Year. The two met again at WrestleMania 26, with The Undertaker again defeating Michaels and ending his career.

Best Year:

1999.

Best Accomplishment:

It's for The Streak that "The Phenom" will always be remembered. World titles will be won and lost, but 'Taker's WrestleMania winning streak—now at 18-0—is a feat that in all likelihood will never be duplicated.

Best Arena:

Detroit's Joe Louis Arena. It was here that The Undertaker won his first WWF/E title, defeating Hulk Hogan at the 1991 Survivor Series. It was also here that Undertaker made his return to confront Randy Orton after the 2005 Survivor Series and engaged in the classic triple-threat at Vengeance in 2002 in which The Rock defeated 'Taker and Kurt Angle for the Undisputed championship.

Best Move:

Tombstone piledriver. Among The Undertaker's many devastating finishers is this belly-to-belly variation of the piledriver. When executed correctly (which is almost always), his opponent doesn't get up.

Best Partner:

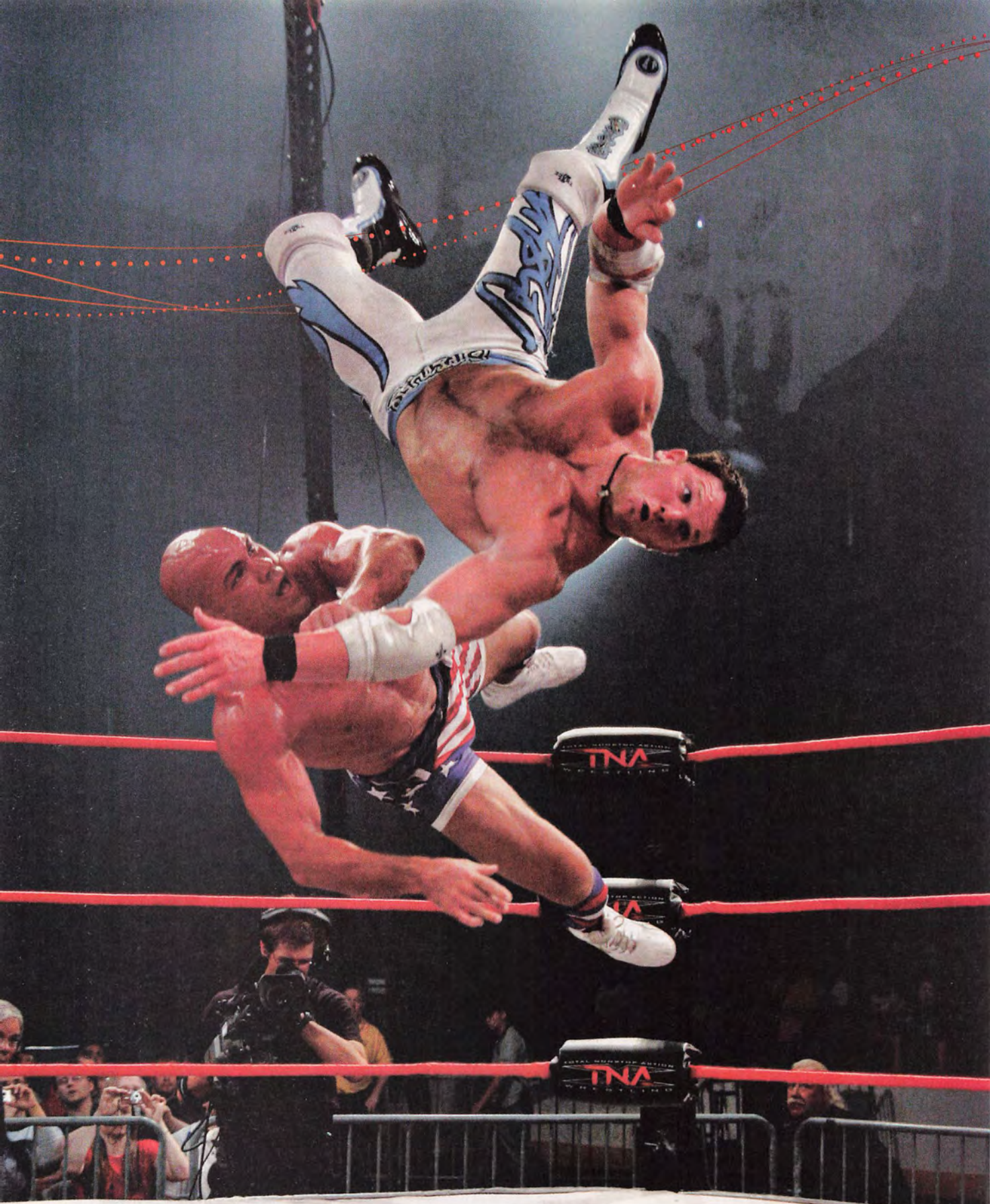
Kane. When Kane and The Undertaker work together as the Brothers of Destruction, there's almost no stopping them. Of The Undertaker's seven tag team title reigns, three have been with "The Big Red Monster."

Best Female Associate:

Michelle McCool. So far, they have not been involved in a wrestling angle together, but real-life romances are so much sweeter. The two were married on June 26.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

Undertaker proved that a wrestler doesn't have to be locked in to a singular style for an entire career. By constantly incorporating new martial arts philosophies into his game plan, 'Taker has stayed relevant, fresh, and very highly paid as he moves through his 40s.



Best Photo In Our Files:

Kurt Angle vs. AJ Styles 2008

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

The Best Of

Kurt Angle

Best Match:

April 3, 2005: vs. Shawn Michaels. In a rivalry that began two months earlier at the Royal Rumble, Angle and Michaels finally met at WrestleMania 21. After nearly 30 minutes of action, Angle applied his anklelock submission for the win in what remains a WrestleMania classic.

Best Opponent:

Samoa Joe. Just as Tazz had made a name for himself in the WWF/E by ending Angle's undefeated streak at the 1998 Royal Rumble, Angle set his sights on the undefeated Samoa Joe in his TNA debut on October 19. Angle ended Joe's streak at Genesis on November 19, which was only the beginning of a feud between two of today's top stars.

Best Year:

2007.

Best Accomplishment:

Having previously held virtually every title in WWF/E, Angle looked to do the same in TNA. As TNA and IWGP champion, Angle set a new milestone at Hard Justice on August 12, 2007, when he defeated then-X division and tag team champion Samoa Joe to simultaneously hold every TNA male title.

Best Arena:

Pittsburgh's Mellon Arena. Angle's hometown arena is where Angle defeated "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin for the WWF title at 2001's Unforgiven, just 12 days after 9/11.

Best Move:

Anklelock. One of many devastating moves in Angle's arsenal, the anklelock is his most lethal, often being applied without warning for near-certain submission.

Best Partner:

Chris Benoit. Though their union was short-lived, Angle and Benoit battled through a tournament culminating in a WWE tag team title victory over Edge and Rey Mysterio Jr. at No Mercy in 2002.

Best Female Associate:

Karen Angle. After convincing Samoa Joe that she was leaving Kurt, Karen eventually helped her then-husband win all of TNA's titles at Hard Justice 2007. Though her manipulative ways sometimes backfired, she continued to help Kurt for the next year.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

As an Olympic gold medalist, Angle has legitimized the pro game for aspiring amateurs as no one has ever done before. No longer do amateur wrestlers turn their nose up to the pro game, particularly when they see what kind of money men like Angle and Jack Swagger can make.



Best Photo In Our Files:

Chris Jericho vs. X-Pac 2000

Photo by John S. Pithers

The BEST OF

Chris Jericho

Best Match:

September 14, 1997: vs. Eddie Guerrero. Before attaining main-event status in WWF/E, Jericho put on some of the best matches of his career against WCW cruiserweights such as Dean Malenko, Rey Mysterio Jr., and Guerrero. His successful cruiserweight title defense against Guerrero at Clash of the Champions XXXV was a classic.

Best Opponent:

The Rock. When Jericho made his WWF debut in 1999, he and The Rock had a classic verbal exchange and would cross paths here and there before a real rivalry heated up in 2001. As partners and opponents, their combined talents always made for magical moments.

Best Year:

2008.

Best Accomplishment:

Jericho's list of in-ring accomplishments is one of the longest ever. But defeating The Rock and "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin at Vengeance on December 9, 2001, to become the first-ever WWE Undisputed champion was the pinnacle.

Best Arena:

State College, Pennsylvania's Bryce Jordan Center. As Jericho's rivalry with WWF champion Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley reached a boiling point, Jericho was at the height of his popularity as he challenged for the title on the April 17, 2000, episode of *Raw*.

Best Move:

Walls of Jericho. With a diverse array of submission holds and high-flying moves, it's hard to say which is Jericho's best. But when he rolls his opponents over into his modified Boston crab, it nearly always gives him the win.

Best Partner:

The Big Show. While many saw their partnerships as a "marriage of convenience," Jeri-Show ended up establishing a record-setting 140-day WWE Unified tag title reign.

Best Female Associate:

Trish Stratus. While tagging with Christian, Jericho began courting Stratus in November 2003. The chemistry between the two carried over into the ring when they won an inter-gender tag match on the December 1 *Raw*. They remained friends ... until Stratus (justifiably) turned on him at WrestleMania XX, and helped Christian get the win over his former partner.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

Jericho's moderately successful forays into various projects such as music and television have proven that wrestlers with charisma and skill needn't confine their talents to a ring.



Best Photo In Our Files:
Jack Swagger vs. Christian 2009
Photo by George Napalitano

The BEST OF

Jack Swagger

Best Match:

April 13, 2009: vs. John Cena. With two draft picks at stake, ECW champion Jack Swagger faced perhaps his biggest challenge to date against World champion John Cena on a special three-hour edition of *Raw*. Though Cena was victorious, Swagger not only proved he could hang with WWE's biggest star, but even had a smattering of crowd support.

Best Opponent:

Christian. After proving his worth as ECW champion against the likes of Matt Hardy and Finlay, Swagger was caught off-guard when Christian made his return from TNA on the February 10, 2009, edition of *ECW*, and was beaten in a non-title match. Swagger would eventually lose the title to Christian at Backlash on April 26, and the two would go on to have a heated rivalry in the ring and on the microphone.

Best Year:

2010.

Best Accomplishment:

Though winning the Money in the Bank ladder match at WrestleMania 26, then cashing it in just two days later to win the World championship from an injured Chris Jericho (after a spear by Edge) on the April 2, 2010, were both great achievements, Swagger still had to prove he was fit to be champion. He did just that when he defeated Jericho and Edge in a three-way battle on the April 16 edition of *Smackdown*.

Best Arena:

Baltimore's 1st Mariner Arena. After a string of non-title losses (including two against Randy Orton) in the week's leading up to 2010's Extreme Rules, Swagger redeemed himself at the April 25 pay-per-view with a solid victory over "The Viper" in an Extreme Rules match.

Best Move:

Gutwrench power bomb. It's not a fancy move, but Swagger often finishes his opponents with this simple, but effective, slam.

Best Partner:

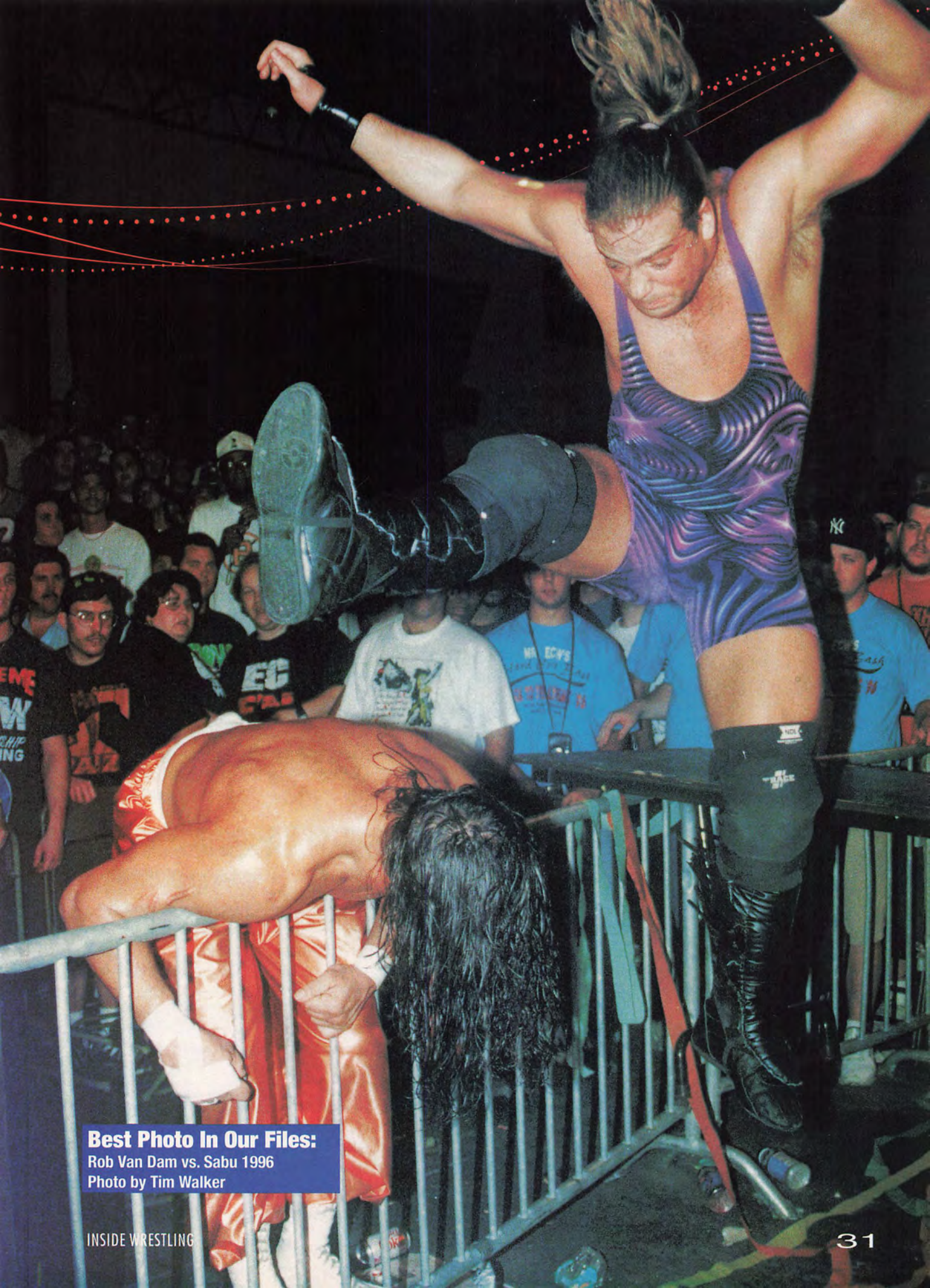
Mark Henry. Swagger's never had a consistent tag team partner, but he and Henry formed a formidable on-and-off alliance during Swagger's feuds with Matt Hardy, Tommy Dreamer, Finlay, and Christian in 2008 and 2009.

Best Female Associate:

Eve Torres. After being traded to Raw, Swagger expressed his romantic interest in the Diva in late-2009. Nothing ever came of this angle.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

A football player and All-American wrestler at the University of Oklahoma, Swagger's career got off to a flying start. He weathered a horrendous second half of 2009, proving to the WWE locker room that mental toughness can take you as far as physical skills in this business.



Best Photo In Our Files:
Rob Van Dam vs. Sabu 1996
Photo by Tim Walker

The Best Of

Rob Van Dam

Best Match:

April 4, 1998: vs. Bam Bam Bigelow. One of RVD's shining moments in ECW was when he faced Bam Bam Bigelow for the TV title. After nearly 20 minutes of brutality, he connected with the Van Daminator for the win.

Best Opponent:

Jerry Lynn. While ECW's name was built on the hardcore style, the aerial and technical masterpieces between RVD and Lynn in 1999 and 2000 demonstrated that extreme wrestling could also encompass world-class athleticism.

Best Year:

2006.

Best Accomplishment:

Having held numerous singles titles, a major world title had always eluded RVD. But when he successfully cashed in his WrestleMania 22 Money in the Bank title shot against John Cena at One Night Stand on June 11, 2006, he became the first person to simultaneously hold the WWE and ECW titles.

Best Arena:

The Arena. Formerly known as the ECW Arena, this South Philadelphia warehouse/bingo hall was where many of ECW's boundary-pushing events occurred. RVD helped create many of those defining moments.

Best Move:

Five-Star Frog Splash. Though it often takes just as much out of RVD as his opponents, it's hard for anyone to get up after he hits this gravity-defying finisher from the top turnbuckle.

Best Partner:

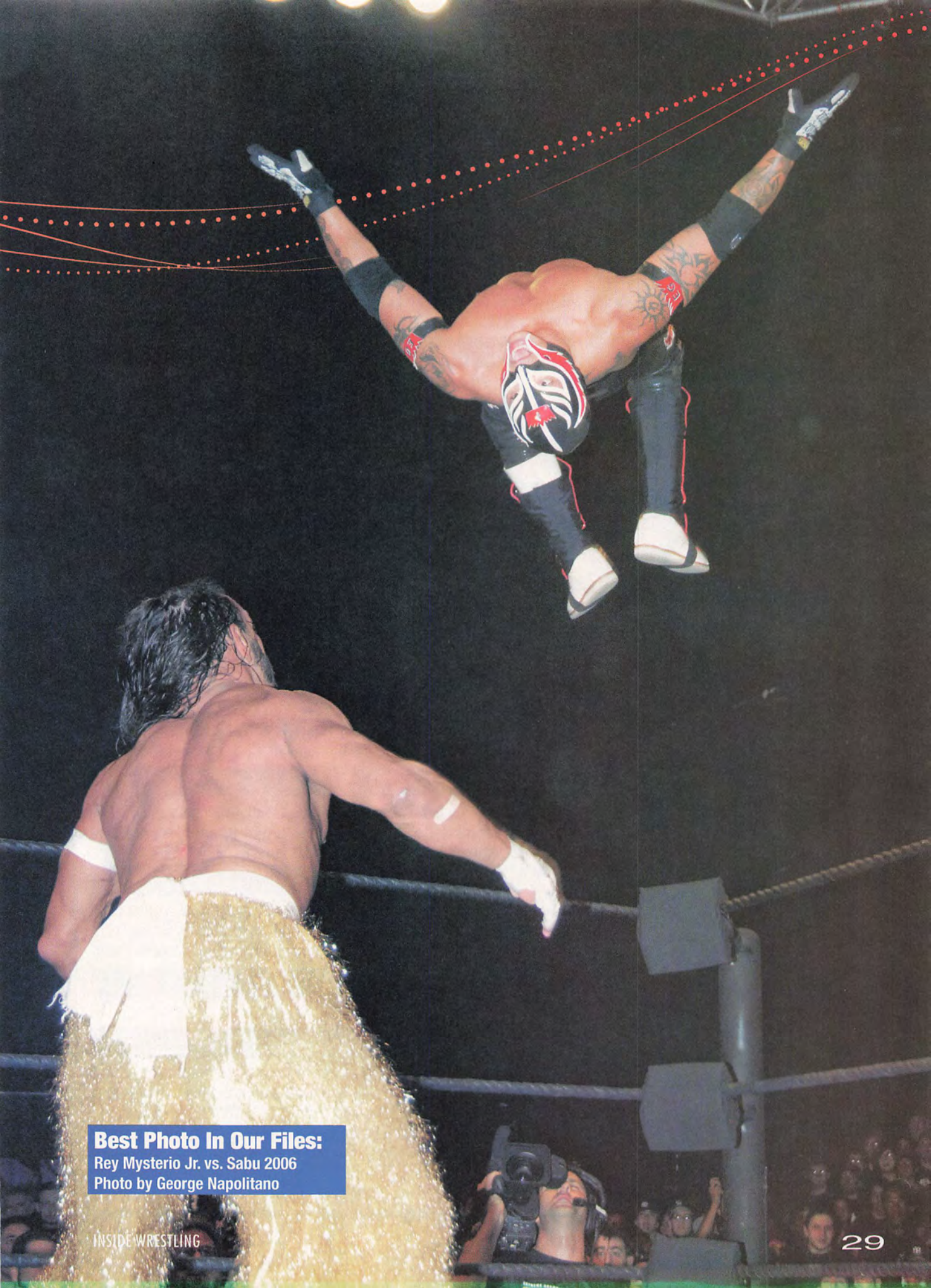
Sabu. RVD's early alliances with long-time rival Sabu in ECW pushed them and their opponents to the limits. Their mutual respect led to two tag team title reigns, as well as some intense matches leading up to those reigns.

Best Female Associate:

N/A

Best Contribution to the Sport:

RVD's martial arts style, his willingness to put his own well-being at risk, and his laid-back persona made him a natural fit in the anything-goes atmosphere of the original ECW. After moving on to WWF/E, he was able to adapt to that company's expectations without losing his edge. Even after 20 years in the business, he still amazes in the ring, which is one reason he is the current TNA champ.



Best Photo In Our Files:
Rey Mysterio Jr. vs. Sabu 2006
Photo by George Napolitano

The BEST OF

Rey Mysterio Jr.

Best Match:

January 29, 2006: Royal Rumble match. One WWE's smallest competitors ever, Mysterio faced 29 other men and seemingly impossible odds. Despite being the second entrant, Mysterio won the Rumble, lasting a record 1:02:12.

Best Opponent:

Eddie Guerrero. The friendship/rivalry between Mysterio and Guerrero helped define WCW's cruiserweight division, but it was in WWE in 2005 that their relationship reached new extremes. What started as a friendly rivalry between tag team title co-holders at WM21 erupted into a personal conflict culminating in a match for custody of Rey's son, Dominick, at SummerSlam 2005.

Best Year:

2006.

Best Accomplishment:

After winning the 2006 Royal Rumble, Mysterio faced then-World champion Kurt Angle and Randy Orton at WrestleMania 22. Though it wasn't his best match by any means, Mysterio overcame the odds once again, pinning Orton and dedicating his title win to the late Guerrero.

Best Arena:

Miami's American Airlines Arena. Mysterio always has big crowd support in cities with large Latino populations. But it was the loss of Guerrero that seemed to fuel Mysterio in his 2006 Royal Rumble victory here.

Best Move:

6-1-9. When an opponent finds himself draped over the second rope, it's usually not long before Mysterio delivers a double-kick to the face. From there, Mysterio usually finishes with the West Coast Pop for a victory.

Best Partner:

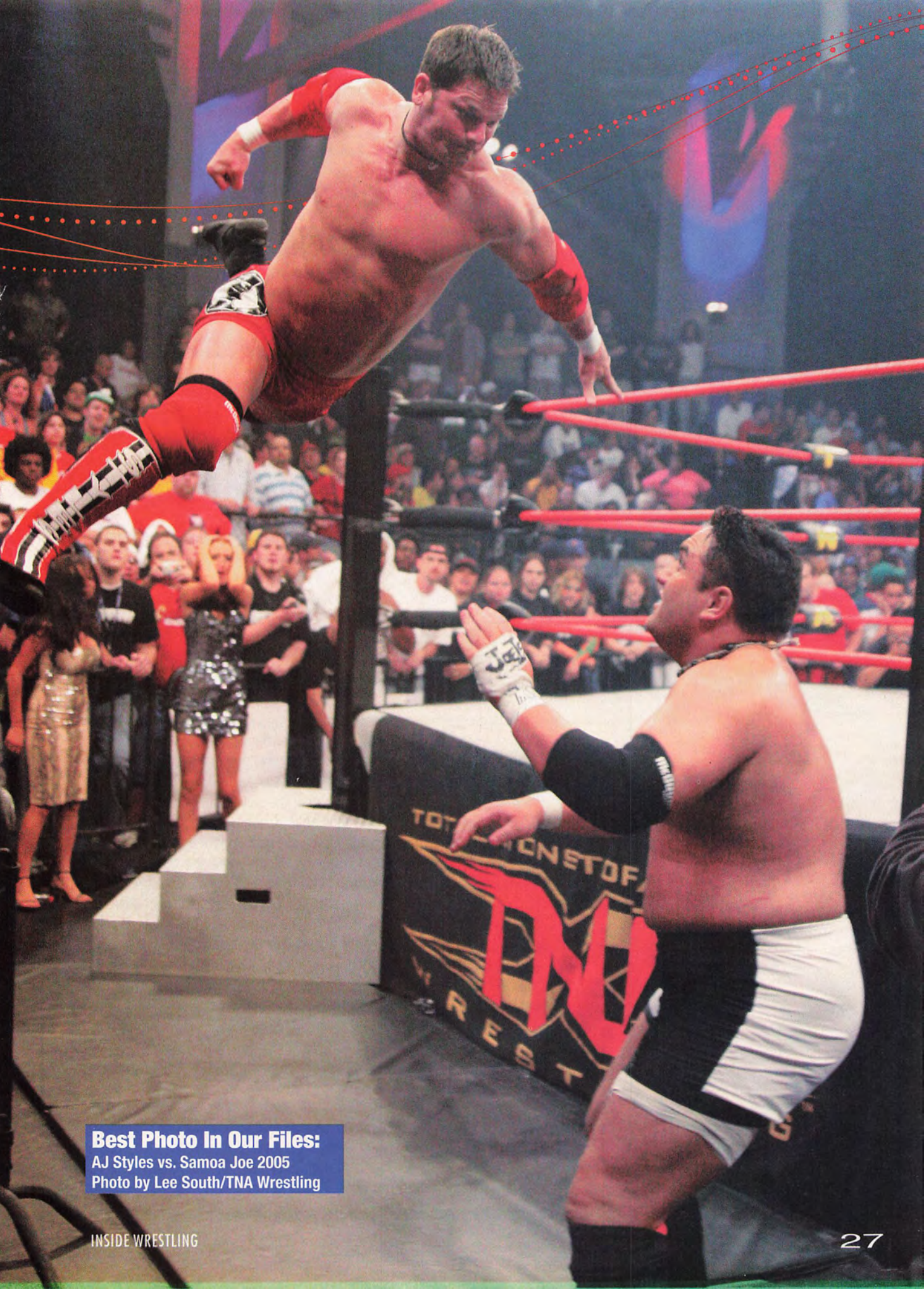
Billy Kidman. The duo won its first title against Chris Benoit and Dean Malenko in 1999, two weeks after Mysterio beat Kidman for the cruiserweight title. Though they failed to win the tag team title again, they did win the cruiserweight tag team championship by defeating Elix Skipper and Kid Romeo on the final edition of *Nitro*, on March 26, 2001.

Best Female Associate:

Tygress. The former Nitro Girl became the valet for The Filthy Animals, a stable that included among others Mysterio, Guerrero, Kidman, and Konan. Tygress occasionally participated in mixed tag matches.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

Mysterio helped introduce American audiences to the lucha libre style. He has become one of the industry's top stars as a result, holding numerous titles, including the WWE World heavyweight title twice.



Best Photo In Our Files:

AJ Styles vs. Samoa Joe 2005

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

The Best Of

AJ Styles

Best Match:

September 11, 2005: vs. Christopher Daniels vs. Samoa Joe. In TNA's final pay-per-view before making its Spike TV debut, X division champion Daniels put his title on the line against Styles and Joe in the main event. Styles came out on top in an intense, dramatic, and high-flying tour de force that is still considered one of the best matches in TNA history.

Best Opponent:

Kurt Angle. Styles has had classic matches with Joe, Daniels, and Sting. But when he and Angle square off, it's always something special, even when there are no titles on the line. These two simply bring out the best in each other and find a way to match each other in the air and on the mat.

Best Year:

2009.

Best Accomplishment:

After a losing streak in the summer of 2009 that had him on the verge of retirement, Styles mounted a comeback that resulted in him winning the TNA World title at No Surrender. The fact that he pinned his nemesis and then-champion Kurt Angle in a five-way match made the feat all the more phenomenal.

Best Arena:

Orlando's Impact Zone. Styles has had some of his best matches and won numerous titles at TNA's home arena at Universal Studios, including the NWA World championship, TNA World title, and TNA X division title.

Best Move:

Styles Clash. Styles has earned the title of "Phenomenal" due to having one of the most expansive sets of moves in the business. But it's this inverted belly-to-back slam that usually leaves his opponents lying in defeat.

Best Partner:

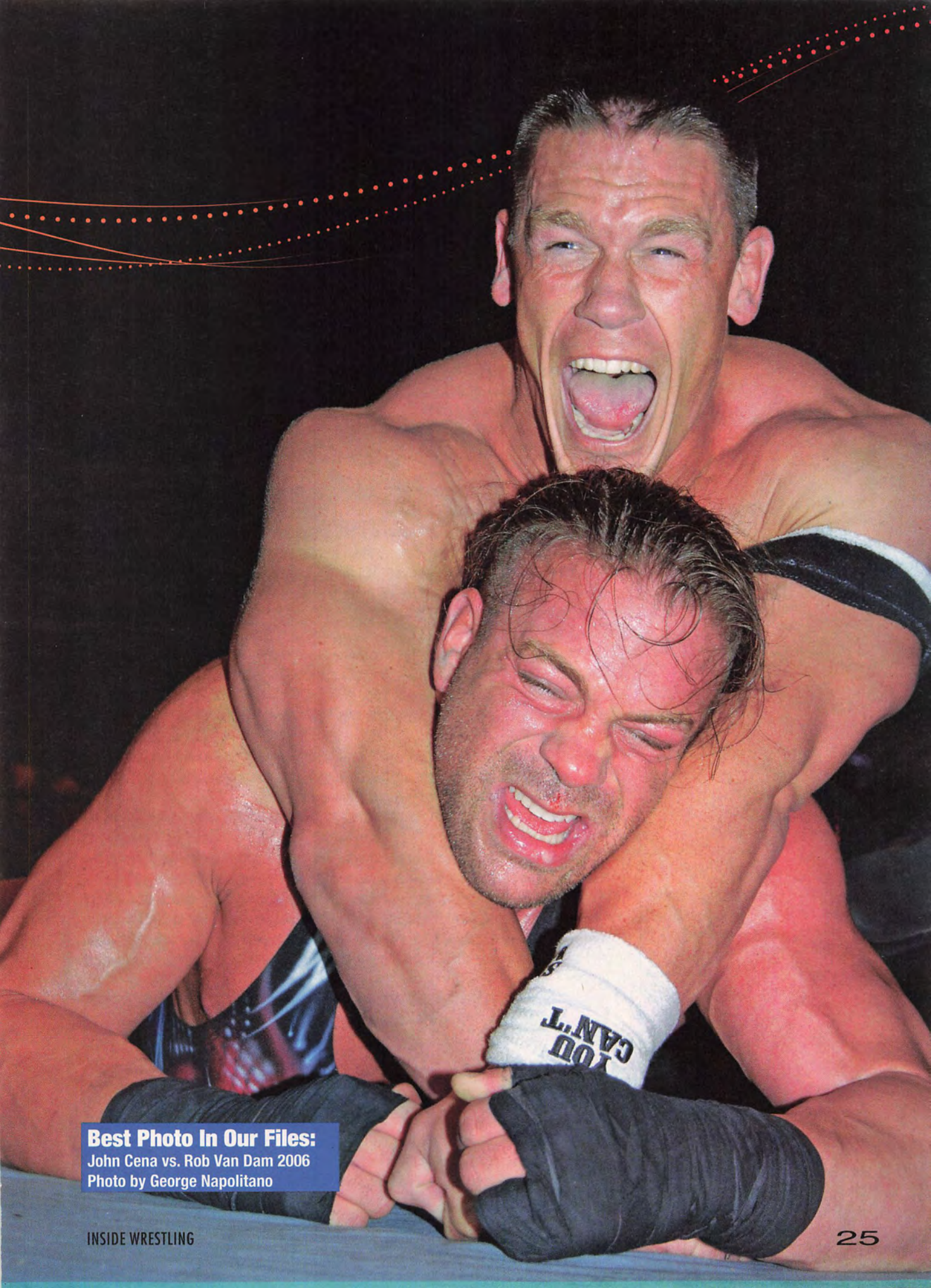
Tomko. Styles has held tag team gold with Jerry Lynn and Christopher Daniels, but it was his reign with Tomko that was most impressive. Styles' speed and agility was complemented by Tomko's size and strength, which brought the duo a title victory over Ron "The Truth" Killings and the debuting Consequences Creed at 2007's Bound for Glory. And even though Styles was torn between aligning himself with Kurt Angle and Christian Cage at the time, his six-month title reign with Tomko was his longest to date.

Best Female Associate:

Karen Angle. After inadvertently becoming hitched to Kurt Angle's wife on the Valentine's Day edition of *Impact* in 2008, Angle came to Styles' aid a few times, eventually helping him defeat Kurt at 2008's Slammiversary.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

While new additions such as Rob Van Dam and Hulk Hogan garner more headlines, Styles' wrestling ability, dedication to TNA, and his number-one finish in the 2010 "PWI 500" make him the unspoken leader and focal point of TNA.



Best Photo In Our Files:
John Cena vs. Rob Van Dam 2006
Photo by George Napolitano

The Best Of

John Cena

Best Match:

April 23, 2007: vs. Shawn Michaels. Just weeks after losing their World tag team title, Cena and Michaels went at it for almost a full hour in England. Though the champ ultimately fell in this non-title match, he displayed an endurance and array of moves that many didn't think he had in him.

Best Opponent:

Edge. Cena has had memorable matches against some of WWE's top competitors. But his feuds with Edge have brought out the best in both wrestlers, in and out of the ring. Though Cena often comes out on top, Edge still finds new dastardly ways to get the better of Cena at times.

Best Year:

2005.

Best Accomplishment:

At a time when his opponents were receiving more cheers from fans than he was, Cena faced Triple-H at WrestleMania 22. Cena not only ignored the dissension to retain the WWE championship, but he did so by making "The Game" tap out to the STF.

Best Arena:

Boston's TD Garden. Better known simply as "The Boston Garden," this is the closest arena to Cena's hometown of West Newbury, Massachusetts. It's also where he won his first WWE World title, defeating Chris Jericho at the 2008 Survivor Series.

Best Move:

Attitude Adjustment. Formerly known as the FU, Cena's biggest power move is a fireman's carry powerslam that means certain defeat for most opponents.

Best Partner:

Shawn Michaels. Though it was a somewhat uneasy alliance, Cena had his longest World tag team title reign with Michaels after defeating two of his biggest rivals in Edge and Randy Orton, while also holding the WWE championship.

Best Female Associate:

Cena's never had a consistent female companion. And despite some implied chemistry between Cena and Mickie James in 2008, it was Maria he put in a liplock backstage before the two won a mixed tag match against Edge and Lita on *Raw* on February 6, 2006.

Best Contribution to the Sport:

Despite continued criticism from hardcore wrestling fans, Cena has taken the torch handed down by Hulk Hogan and "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin as wrestling's ambassador to the mainstream world. He's also a positive and gregarious role model for fans of all ages.

The Best Of The Best

Section Compiled by Jonathan Williams

UNLESS YOU ARE blessed with a photographic memory, remembering exactly which wrestler accomplished what and when and against whom can be challenging.

With so many alliances and feuds coming and going and dozens of titles changing hands dozens of times, it's no wonder we sometimes forget the classic moments that make our favorite wrestlers so special.

Really, in a career as rich and extensive as Chris Jericho's, who can really recall his truly best moments?

Hopefully, this "Best Of ..." section will bring back some fond memories and help you mentally catalogue the highlights of your favorite wrestler's career.

In our (mostly) positive look at the careers of John Cena, AJ Styles, Jack Swagger, Chris Jericho, Randy Orton, Jeff Hardy, Rob Van Dam, Kurt Angle, Rey Mysterio Jr., and The Undertaker, we focus exclusively on the high-water marks in 10 different categories:

Best Match.

The one match that earned this wrestler the respect of fans and opponents alike. AJ Styles and Kurt Angle have had many memorable bouts in TNA, but only one can stand out above the rest.

Best Opponent.

Which adversary helped this wrestler create magic in the ring or on the microphone? Certainly, Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker proved to be perfect dance partners. However, Chris Jericho and The Rock will be remembered as great rivals as well, but for a different reason.

Best Year.

During which 12-month period did this wrestler enjoy his most success?

Best Accomplishment.

The pinnacle of this wrestler's professional career. Where, for example, does Jericho go after beating The Rock and Steve Austin on the same night?

Best Arena.

Which venue is most closely associated with this wrestler's success? There's a reason AJ feels at home in the Impact Zone.

Best Move.

The maneuver this wrestler uses to win most of his matches. We all know what happens after The Undertaker delivers a Tombstone piledriver.

Best Partner.

Which ally has shared the most success with this wrestler? Necessity sometimes makes for some odd pairings.

Best Female Associate.

The woman best remembered for standing behind, or beside, this wrestler. Could Kane have been nearly as creepy without Lita to torment?

Best Contribution to the Sport.

How did this wrestler change the industry in a lasting way, if at all? Like him or not, Kurt Angle made it cool for amateur stars to consider the pro ranks.

Best Photo in our Files.

The one shot that captures this wrestler's essence.

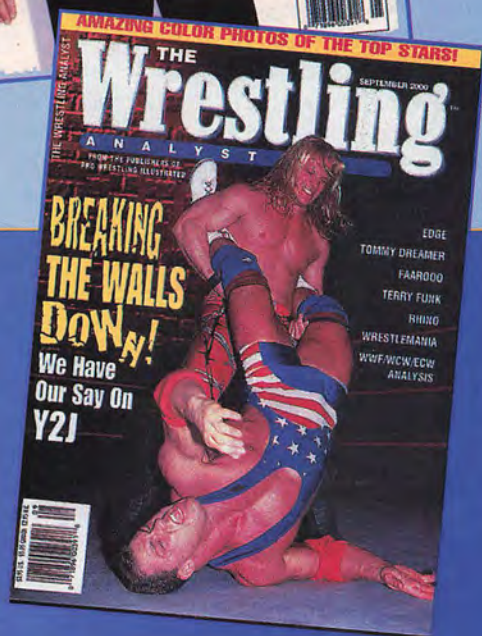
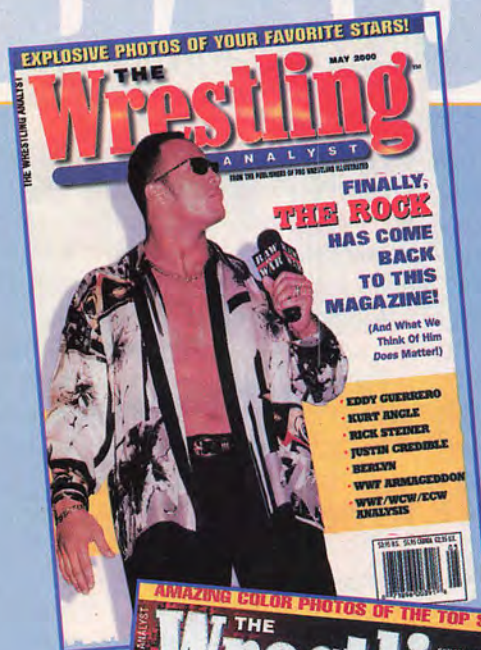
We hope you enjoy this celebration of the very from 10 of wrestling's very best.

THE Wrestling ANALYST

BACK ISSUES

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Sept. 1998: Steve Austin, Booker T., Kane, Bam Bam Bigelow, Scott Norton, Perry Saturn, Tom Brandi, WrestleMania XIV. | <input type="checkbox"/> Nov. 1999: Sting, Godfather, Super Crazy, Darren Drozdov, Horace Hogan, Great American Bash, WWF-WCW-ECW. |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> March 1999: New Age Outlaws, Mark Henry, The Giant, D.O.A., 2 Cold Scorpio, Tracy Smothers, Halloween Havoc. | <input type="checkbox"/> May 2000: The Rock, Eddie Guerrero, Kurt Angle, Rick Steiner, Justin Credible, Berlyn, Armageddon, WWF-WCW-ECW. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> May 1999: Scott Hall, X-Pac, Lex Luger, Chris Jericho, Val Venis, Al Snow, Rob Van Dam, Starrcade. | <input type="checkbox"/> July 2000: Rikishi, Test, Madusa, Mike Awesome, Meng, Albert, Royal Rumble, WWF-WCW-ECW. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> July 1999: Vince McMahon, Dudleys, Billy Kidman, Goldust, Konnan, Dan Severn, Valentine's Day Massacre, WWF-WCW-ECW. | <input type="checkbox"/> Sept. 2000: Chris Jericho, Edge, Tommy Dreamer, Terry Funk, Rhino, WrestleMania, WWF-WCW-ECW. |

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and Lucha flavor. ¶I won't lie and tell you I made the trip to this non-descript town for a card called "We Must Eat Michigan's Brain" for any other reason than to see Bryan Danielson fresh off his WWE firing. To no one's surprise, he pinned CHIKARA veteran Eddie Kingston with a small package in a real nice 15-minute bout, but so many in the crowd wanted to hear what he'd have to say afterward. ¶Sorry to get on my soapbox, but I'll never understand why so many fans are more into the talking than the wrestling these days. Anyway, to his credit, Danielson didn't bury WWE or blow his own horn much. You can tell he's a little angry—just something about his body language—but he urged everyone to continue to support the indies, no matter what his future holds. ¶He'll probably end up back in WWE, but I almost hope it doesn't happen. There's something pretty special about watching him in an intimate indy setting.

ORLANDO, FL: Something a little sad about watching TNA Slammiversary this year. Maybe sad is a bit strong, but it felt like the end for Sting as he took on Rob Van Dam for the TNA World gold in the main event. RVD tried and Sting tried, and it wasn't bad, but there was no getting around a clash of styles here, and Sting just looks like he's losing about another quarter-step each month. ¶It's funny that I was never the biggest Sting fan when he was in his prime, but people thought he was more or less done when WCW crashed in 2001, and yet he keeps coming back, off and on, and has reinvented himself a little here and there, for now even running afoul of the fans you know he loves.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ONE OF THE BEST, EVEN IN DEFEAT

¶Suffice to say he's earned my respect as one of the true top stars of his generation, and I never thought I'd say that. But I think it's finally time for him to walk away.

¶Speaking of sad, I didn't need to see Tommy Dreamer show up to get in the middle of the Team 3-D/Jesse Neal mess. Don't get me wrong—Dreamer and his everyman approach earned my respect long ago, and that will never go away, but fans predictably dusted off a light "E-C-W" chant again. Does Dreamer really still need that same old adrenaline fix in 2010? I hope not, as ECW should have been buried long before Vince McMahon did it officially a few months back. ¶Let it rest in some sort of violent peace.

NEW YORK, NY: Thought I'd spend a nice, quiet Friday afternoon at my favorite corner bar enjoying a few Dewar's and waters to wash down a couple of the best corned beef sandwiches with mustard on rye you'll find in this world, but it just so happened that Jake, who's owned the joint since the mid-'70s, got caught up in World Cup fever and opened the place up to a bunch

of yahoos who suddenly called themselves soccer fans. I swear that 90 percent of these kids don't even know the rules of this god-awful sport, but hell, it's European, it's the hot thing, so they pretend to like it.

¶Place went crazy when the Americans rallied to tie that legendary world power called Slovenia, 2-2. I bet most of them couldn't find Slovenia on a map, or even get the right continent. ¶Nice how most of these kids say they can't watch baseball because it's slow and boring, but they'll watch this European garbage, with guys running up and down a field for 90 minutes or whatever and scoring maybe a goal or two the whole time if they're lucky. Don't get me started on the officiating. You thought WWE refs were incompetent? ¶Matt Brock is as patriotic as they come, but I was glad to see us get bounced from the tourney a week later. Don't let this phony soccer craziness get any further out of control than it already is in these parts. If you're looking for a wrestling connection here, the officiating is as close as I'm going to get. If Saks doesn't like it, he can give me a column in *Pro Soccer Illustrated*. □

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

PHILADELPHIA, PA: Never a bad idea to hand Arn Anderson a microphone and let him say whatever's on his mind, even now, a decade into retirement. Anderson appeared on *Raw* to salute Ricky Steamboat and conveniently help plug WWE's new Steamboat DVD and at least sounded like he was still in his prime. Not sure his retired body would agree, and it made me wince to hear him have to call Steamboat one of the all-time greats along with a brief list of Triple-H, Shawn Michaels, and The Undertaker. Not sure one of those guys belongs on that list. You know, the one who's so desperate to prove he belongs. ¶ Anyway, you know Arn's become a good company man when he forgets to put a certain old friend living in Charlotte on that list. I digress. ¶ Arn's fists

still looked pretty good as he, Steamboat, and a few old friends tried to make a stand against this Nexus group. Give the young bucks a little credit for taking the legends out one by one. I'm getting asked a lot about Wade Barrett and company and hearing comparisons to the NWO. Those make me shake my head. ¶ Haven't seen enough of these guys in tough, high-profile matches, but I'd urge people to turn it down a notch. Pretty much anyone can wreak havoc with a pack mentality. Every last one of these guys is unproven one-on-one, so I wouldn't brand any of them as a star-in-the-making just yet. ¶ Caught up with Arn later at a local watering hole and asked him about the inevitable comparisons to The Four Horsemen, one of the most nefarious supergroups this sport has ever seen. "For all the bad stuff we did," he said, "we backed it up in the ring with a whole lotta gold and a whole lotta respect even. They got a ways to go, Matt." Smart man. Check back in a year and see if we even remember the name Nexus.

TAYLOR, MI: Never thought I'd go to a wrestling card and see a live comic book break out, but that's kind of what CHIKARA looked like to me. Took a few hours for me to figure out just what I thought. An acquired taste for sure, and I'm not sure it's a taste this aged scribe will ever acquire. ¶ The promotion does, in addition to presenting plenty of colorful, outrageous, and over-the-top characters (UltraMantis, Green Ant, and Frightmare, to name but a few) that are meant to appeal to a younger demographic than the one I am stuck in, give you some damn good indy wrestling with a little Japanese



STILL GOT IT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

was an incredible feeling, that house of Bruno Sammartino."

As the '60s came to a close, Maynard settled in Southern California, where he twice won the Americas tag team championship with Rocky Johnson and Dory Dixon.

For anyone with a knowledge of these men, it's obvious that Maynard's partners were all black. That's the way pro wrestling was back then. Among the stereotypical moves that black wrestlers were supposed to perform was the headbutt. Earl took particular pride in his. "I watched others do it, and besides Harley Race or Terry Funk, it was usually a black wrestler's spot. I did mine extremely fast from the side, nailing the side of my opponent's head. Everyone said it was much different than Bobo Brazil's straight-on Cocobutt."

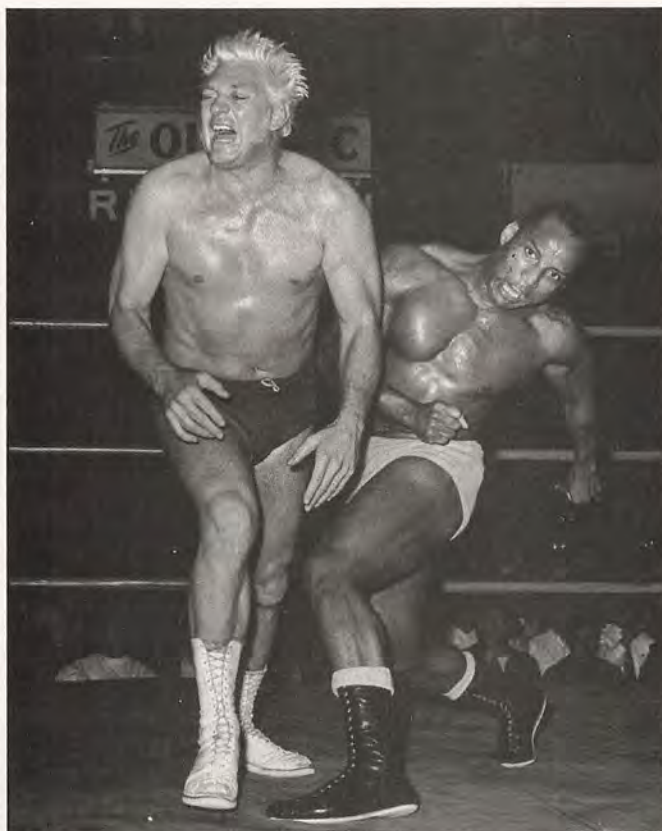
Maynard said he rarely experienced racism, but that when it did occur, it was extremely scary. He recalls that while on the Funks' Amarillo circuit, some fans yelled 'coon.' "I had to ask what a 'coon' was. Sometimes we didn't know if we'd make it out alive. I was almost lynched during my match with Cowboy Bob Ellis there. But he and Bobby Shane protected me."

Being in Los Angeles and looking the way he did, Maynard caught the eye of Hollywood. "I hadn't planned on leaving wrestling for acting, but soon loved a safer way to make a living," he laughed.

Though a fan favorite in the ring, Maynard often played the heavy on the silver screen ("something I learned by studying Fred Blassie and John Tolos"). His first movie, in 1972, was *Melinda*, followed by *Black Belt Jones* with Bruce Lee, *Mandingo*, *The Nude Bomb*, *The Sword And The Sorcerer*, and several more.

Maynard left wrestling in 1977 after landing his big role in *The Deep*. Shortly thereafter, Jack LaLanne brought him in as a consultant for his European Health Spas, which were America's first health clubs. "Jack said I had more energy than anyone! He's still going strong at 95 years old!"

Maynard still comes back to the U.S. every year to renew his health insurance and to talk to young bodybuilders about the danger of trying to take shortcuts. "We should dedicate ourselves to improv-



Maynard staggers Don Carson with a right during a 1969 match at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. The two-time Mr. Universe stays in great shape to this day, living in his native Barbados.

ing, not risking our health," he said. "There are no shortcuts to hard work. Steroids create future problems everywhere in the body, plus early death. Today's wrestling is very different from when I retired. Many kids have died. And Billy Graham will admit I was the first to tell him in 1972 not to bring steroids into wrestling, that it would ruin his health eventually, which it did, and hurt others. We didn't know then just how dangerous they were and would become."

In addition to acting and business interests, Maynard now produces and directs films in Barbados. "I've done well in real estate and operate several properties, like the Ocean Ridge Resort. I love diving and, until recently, was still winning senior titles in bodybuilding. And finally, this year, I'm making my first Cauliflower Alley reunion. I can't wait to see old friends I've not seen in decades. Friends and health—what better tag team in life is there?" □

By Mike Lano

EARL MAYNARD

THERE WAS A time in modern wrestling history that the body beautiful was completely out of the ordinary. At the time Earl Maynard broke in to the sport in 1960, you could count on one hand the number of wrestlers with the type of chiseled physiques that are so commonplace today.

While there is little doubt that Maynard's muscles got him noticed early on, it was his skills that brought him success.

"I still say, master your ring skills, the mat, and chain basics," said Maynard, who now lives in his native Barbados. "What's it matter having a nice body but little wrestling ability? Appearance is nice, but you better know how to work or you'll embarrass yourself. Master your craft."

The two-time Mr. Universe (1964, 1965) owes his wrestling career to a decision he made as a teen. "I was a skinny kid (5'10", 130 pounds) and in poor health at 17 growing up in Barbados," he said. "I moved to England to finish my physiotherapy studies and began working hard to improve my health and body in the process."

After joining the British Air Force, he was put on its wrestling team. Earl was stationed in Cypress, where he hand-made most of his weights. "A British promoter saw me working out and got me involved in pro wrestling," he said.

In 1967, Kansas promoter Gust Karras brought him to Bob Geigel's territory, where it was quickly made obvious that the old guard was not going to welcome the bodybuilder with open arms.

"Soon after coming to America, Dick the Bruiser shot on me as my first baptism, right before I was to face Gene Kiniski for the NWA belt. He mangled my legs ... Welcome to American wrestling!"

Karras became Maynard's promoter/manager and sent him, with Ernie Ladd, to Verne Gagne's AWA, where they frequently wrestled the combination of Harley Race and Larry Hennig. "Then he had me work for Vince Senior at Madison Square Garden, teaming with Ernie, Bobo Brazil, and Bearcat Wright, which was a dream-come-true. It



Photo by Mike Lano

CHRIS JERICHO

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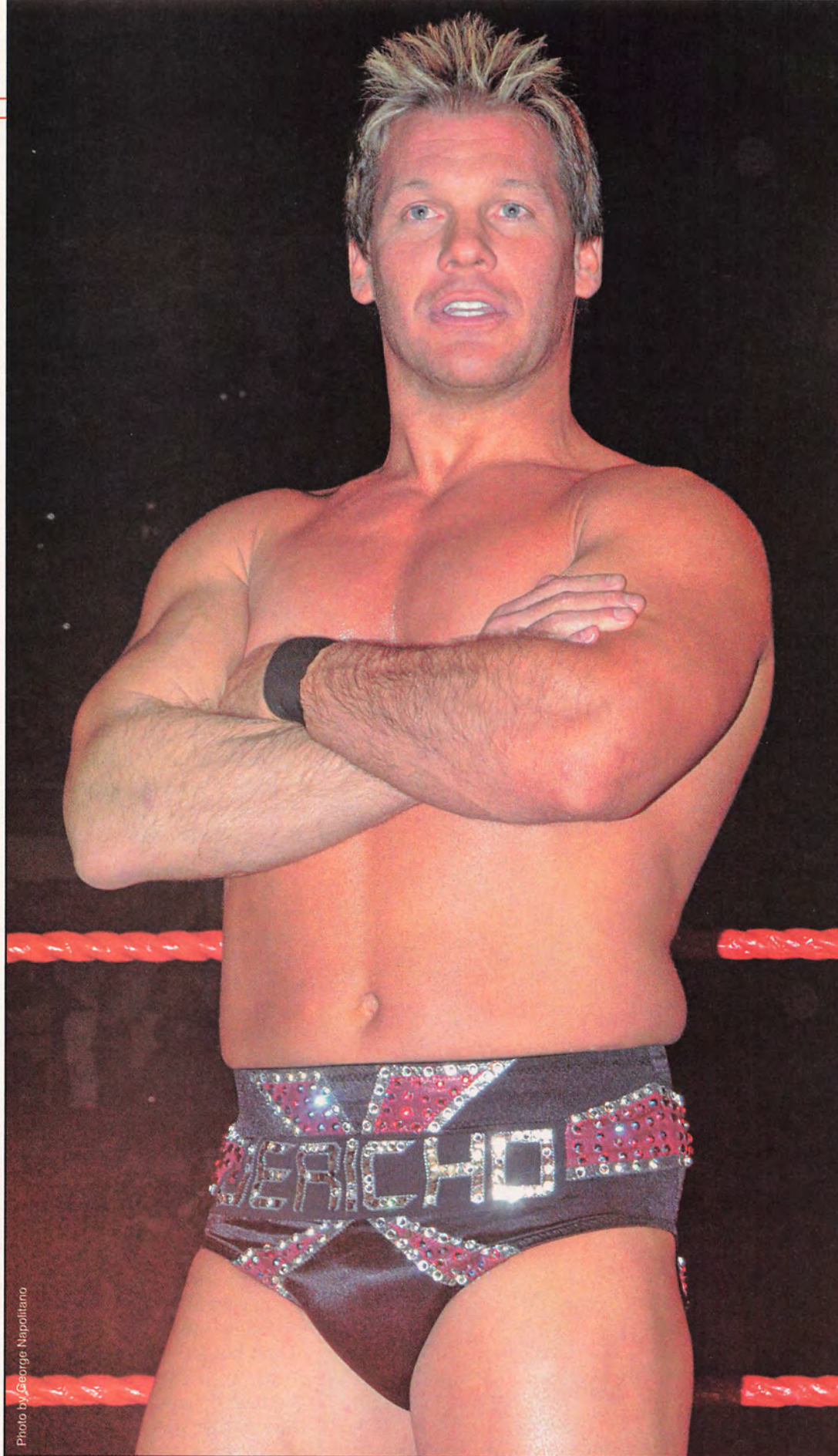


Photo by George Napolitano

BORN IN MANHASSET, New York, on November 9, 1970 ... Raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada ... Father Ted Irvine starred for the New York Rangers of the National Hockey League ... Enrolled in the Hart Brothers Wrestling School in Calgary at age 19 ... On the first day of the camp, met Lance Storm ... Made pro debut two months later, wrestling Storm to a draw ... Duo formed a tag team called Sudden Impact ... Began using the last name Jericho, taken from the Helloween album *Walls Of Jericho* ... Worked tours of Northern Manitoba for Tony Condello, alongside Storm and fellow future stars Triple-H, Edge, Christian, and Rhino ... Toured Japan with Storm for Frontier Martial Arts ... Continued to expand international horizons by traveling to Mexico ... Wrestled for CMLL and several smaller companies ... As Corazón de León, captured NWA middleweight title from Mano Negra ... Held title for 11 months before falling to Ultimo Dragon in Japan ... Briefly held WAR's International junior heavyweight title ... Reunited with Storm as The Thrillseekers in Smoky Mountain Wrestling ... Competed in the Super J Cup tournament in Japan, losing to Wild Pegasus (Chris Benoit) ... Won ECW TV title in first night with the promotion ... Signed with WCW ... Beat Syxx (Shawn Waltman) for first cruiserweight title ... Lost the title but regained it from Alex Wright ... Won third cruiserweight title from Rey Mysterio Jr. ... Took the mask of Juventud Guerrera in a title-vs.-mask match ... Dean Malenko masqueraded as the masked Ciclope in battle royal win to gain a cruiserweight shot at Jericho, then

won the title ... Jericho claimed to be a "conspiracy victim" ... Scoured the Library of Congress records, looking for a loophole ... Defeated Malenko for fourth reign ... Traded the belt with Mysterio, before losing it to Guerrera ... Defeated Stevie Ray for WCW TV title ... Began calling out WCW World champ



Photo by Matt Roberts

When Jericho locks in the Walls of Jericho, opponents rarely have a chance to break free.

Goldberg ... Lost TV title to Konnan ... Made WWF debut on *Raw*, engaging in verbal confrontation with The Rock ... Feuded with Chyna over the I-C title ... Duo became the first-ever co-holders of the title... Lost I-C title to Kurt Angle ... Won Angle's European title by pinning Benoit in triple-threat match at WM 2000 ... Seemingly won WWF World title from Triple-H, but decision was overturned ... Traded I-C title with Benoit ... Popularity took off during feud with Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley ... With Benoit, beat Steve Austin and Triple-H for WWF World tag title ... Sided with WWF during the

WCW/ECW Invasion ... Beat The Rock for the WCW World title ... Unified the WWF and WCW World titles at Vengeance, beating The Rock and Austin on the same night ... Lost Undisputed championship to Triple-H at WrestleMania X-8 ... Won WWE tag title with Christian ... Defeated by Shawn Michaels at WM 19 ... Lost to Christian at WM XX after Trish Stratus interfered ... Competed in first-ever Elimination Chamber match ... Lost to Lance Storm at ECW One Night Stand ... Feuded with WWE champ John Cena ... Lost "You're Fired" match to Cena in August 2005 and took hiatus ... Returned in November 2007 after viral video campaign ... Feuded with WWE champion Randy Orton, then John Bradshaw Layfield ... Engaged in a long feud with Michaels after attacking HBK on an episode of "The Highlight Reel" ... Captured World title in a Championship Scramble ... Lost belt to Batista, but regained it eight days later ... Won three *PWI* Achievement awards in 2008—Comeback, Feud (vs. Michaels), and Most Hated ... Began feud with various legends, leading to a three-on-one handicap match against Jimmy Snuka, Roddy Piper, and Ricky Steamboat (with Ric Flair) at WrestleMania 25 ... Traded I-C title during feud with Mysterio ... Established record 140-day reign as Unified tag team champion with the Big Show ... Lost title to D-X ... Pinned The Undertaker in an Elimination Chamber to regain World title ... Defeated Edge at WM 26, but lost title two days later when Jack Swagger cashed in his MITB stipulation ... Served as "pro" to *NXT* rookie Wade Barrett, guiding the Englishman to Season One victory.

new adversaries running for cover. They got the best of them!

Such a confrontation could have and should have been teased for a lot longer.

Then the whole thing got so much more convoluted, as then-Raw GM Bret Hart fired the group en masse, only to be attacked by them later. Then they were rehired, they offered a fake apology, and then Vince McMahon was revealed to be backing them, only to have Nexus attack him. We even had Cena saying he was glad they had gotten contracts because it would be easier for him to get after them.

I'm not sure how I would have booked the second week of the Nexus invasion, and it's pointless to even think about it now, but I think I could have done a little better. Maybe I would have begun with the idea of Wade Barrett cashing in his title shot at WrestleMania 27—that's right, nearly 10 months down the road—and then figured out how to get there from here.

I didn't intend to make this another bash WWE Creative column, as WWE is hardly the only promotion to make these kinds of mistakes. But for whatever reason, be it lack of creativity, backstage politics, ego, lack of planning, or all of the above, this happens way too often. The fact that there's a pay-per-view to put together every month sure doesn't help.

Just think back to the last invasion in WWE. Bringing in old WCW talent back in 2001 (after WWE bought the remnants of that company) one by one in random sneak-attacks was a great plan. Unfortunately, WWE chose not to sign most of the top WCW talent right away, and rather than allowing that invasion to play out over a year or so, with the WCW rabble-rousers



Despite WWE's track record for developing interesting storylines and characters, Lenker points out that WWE has also botched its share over the years. Goldberg is just one of several wrestlers WWE mishandled.

not getting crushed until the very, very end, Vince chose to bury that company and its stars within a few months, leaving, as many insiders lamented, a whole pile of potential profits on the table.

In the midst of that, Paul Heyman shockingly left his post as *Raw* color commentator to deliver a blistering promo and resurrect a band of ECW rebels inside WWE ... only to have Stephanie McMahon reveal herself as the new "owner" of ECW. So much for that.

I'm sure you can come up with other examples. Goldberg vs. The Rock sounded like the dream match of dream matches at one point, but WWE destroyed that pretty nicely and quickly. Heck, just a few months ago, Bret returning to

avenge himself against his old boss held such promise. Then the storyline got far too complicated, seemed all too contrived, and ended with a whimper of a match at WrestleMania 26.

I haven't lost all faith in the NXT guys. I'm still high on Wade Barrett and am intrigued by Heath Slater and Michael Tarver, too. And I think some very good things are possible for Daniel Bryan once he is inevitably rehired by WWE. I envision that coming together in much the same way as Matt Hardy's 2005 return to WWE after his firing following the revelation that his real-life girlfriend, Lita, had had a real-life tryst with the real-life version of Edge.

Then again, that, too, started out well and then ... □

With Dave Lenker

I AM A bit of a horror film buff. Not the real blood-and-guts-and-torture stuff that the *Saw* series has made so popular in recent years (haven't seen even one of those). I prefer the edge-of-your-seat suspense-fests that a truly creative filmmaker can produce without having to resort to all the cheap shortcuts. I consider the original 1978 version of *Halloween*, starring a very young Jamie Lee Curtis, to be among the best movies I've ever seen.

There was a much lesser-known film that piqued my interest nearly a decade ago. It's called *Jeepers Creepers*. It's about a brother and sister driving home for spring break from college. Of course, they choose not to take the main highway, opting instead for a mostly deserted two-lane road through the sticks somewhere in what I think is the Midwest. And of course, they end up in the creepy business of a creepy guy driving a big, creepy truck. Only bad things happen from there, in the middle of nowhere.

The creepy guy tries to run them off the road and perhaps kill them, for no apparent reason. Later, after the psycho continues on his way, they come upon him dumping what appears to be a few bloody corpses down a chute next to his spooky middle-of-nowhere home. He catches them noticing him, then pursues them again. Skip ahead a few minutes and they end up going back to check out his house (obligatory stupid move by main character in a horror film). More bad things happen from there. I'll still sit back and watch it if I happen to surf across the opening credits on cable.

The first 20 minutes or so, that is. Once I get to that point, I can only sit back, lament a bit, and wonder what could have been had writer/director Victor Salva not blown it from there. The last hour-plus of *Jeepers Creepers*, quite frankly, stinks. It's Viscera-vs.-Great Khali-60-minute-Ironman-match bad. The evil guy ends up being this creature that comes out to "feed" every

20-some years, can turn into a beast that flies, and so forth. Most of the details aren't even worth remembering.

Don't worry, I'm not about to compare wrestling to a horror show. Well ... maybe a little.

Suffice to say you don't have to be a horror movie lover to get my point here. It can be any movie, TV show, book, play, or short story, but don't you just hate it when you get a great set-up followed by a really lame payoff in the end?

I can't think of a much better way to transition the original NXT guys into WWE than what WWE gave us on June 7. Complete destruction of the ring, most of the people around it pummeled, and John Cena taking a beatdown worthy of the original NWO. Within the span of just a few moments, we had possibly the most menacing supergroup—a bunch of relative unknowns, no less—created since Hall, Nash, and Hogan first put the band together 14 years ago.

I loved it. I couldn't wait for the follow-up on June 14.

Or maybe I could. Yeah, I could wait.

In just two weeks, WWE turned what should have been a blockbuster storyline into one that I just hope will be pretty good as it continues to play out. Not only did this Nexus group lock up with some of WWE's finest in an impromptu brawl on the very next *Raw* (at least the seriousness of this invasion was noted by the fact that the heels and fan favorites briefly joined forces to deal with the NXT ne'er-do-wells), but the WWE stars sent their



The NXT-*Raw* invasion storyline had Dave Lenker's attention at the beginning, but has since left him cold. Like many fans, Lenker is hoping for a compelling resolution.

MADISON RAYNE

HEIGHT: 5'3"

WEIGHT: 115

HOMETOWN: West Lafayette, Ohio

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: April 18, 2010—Madison Rayne pins Tara in a steel cage tag match at TNA Lockdown to win the Knockouts title. In the match, Rayne and Beautiful People teammate Velvet Sky had agreed to defend their tag titles while their opponents, Knockouts champion Angelina Love and former champion Tara put up Love's belt. With the win, Rayne became the first woman to simultaneously hold both singles and tag gold in TNA.

SHE DOES IT SO WELL: No longer The Beautiful People "pledge," 24-year-old Rayne has come into her own as a wrestler. While her in-ring work has not been flawless, she continues to find ways to win her matches. This fact has not been lost on Velvet or Lacey, either, as both seem inspired by her work ethic. Since Rayne's emergence in the ring, the group has regained some of the prestige is lost with Love's departure.

WHERE SHE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Until she showed a more ruthless side by retiring Tara from TNA at Sacrifice, Rayne was often criticized for being more concerned with looking pretty than winning matches. Until recently, she had never even won a singles match in the company! While winning the title and fending off Tara go a long way toward shedding this label, lack of focus has been an issue for most of Rayne's TNA tenure. She needs to prove she is skilled enough to fend off all of the challengers in the women's division.

PET FINISHER: Inverted Overdrive (swinging neck-breaker)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Last year, Madison Rayne was humiliated when she was kicked out of The Beautiful People—and had a paper bag placed over her head—by Angelina Love. She was never able to get revenge, let alone actually beat the former BP leader in the ring. With Love now stepping up as an obvious challenger for Rayne's title belt, she could be in for the fight of her life in a grudge match against a woman she has yet to pin.

OUTLOOK: After her confidence boosting pinfall wins over veterans Tara and Roxxi, Rayne could be in for a strong stretch atop the Knockouts division. Plus, with Velvet and Lacey never far behind and all-too-willing to lend a hand, there is room for error. It should also be noted that, with Tara, ODB, Roxxi, and Awesome Kong gone, there is not really a larger, more experienced challenger that could easily overpower her.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "It is unbelievable how far Madison Rayne has come since joining TNA, and she's only 24! I look at her matches, and she has gotten so much better that I have a hard time remembering that Beautiful People lackey we all knew. And with some of the women she's beaten already, I don't see how she can't stay a force here in TNA for years to come."

—Brother Devon



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

EVAN BOURNE

HEIGHT: 5'9"

WEIGHT: 183

HOMETOWN: St. Louis, Missouri

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: June 20, 2010—Evan Bourne upsets Chris Jericho at WWE's Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view, cleanly pinning the former world champ with the Airbourne. Even though the match is not for any singles title, it helps to cement Bourne's reputation in WWE and opens a lot of eyes as to his potential to one day be a top-tier player on Raw or Smackdown.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Watching an Evan Bourne match is like looking at a fine painting. With every stroke of his brush, Bourne adds to a masterpiece that almost feels surreal because of its near perfection. Every move leaves the viewer breathless, and when it comes time for the artist's signature—the Airbourne—one gets the feeling that he is a cut above just about every other wrestler out there.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Probably his biggest obstacle is his size. As evidenced by the toll that years of ring warfare has taken on Rey Mysterio Jr., it could be only a matter of time before major injuries begin to mount and limit his effectiveness in the ring. If Bourne can stay healthy without adding more bulk to his frame, then it will be great. It will also be mostly luck.

PET FINISHER: Airbourne (shooting star press)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Evan Bourne is a long way from being considered one of WWE's biggest stars. He has shown in the past he can be overwhelmed by some of the larger brawlers he faces. In particular, Bourne has had a very difficult time in the ring with Sheamus, who has now won two WWE titles while also dominating every match the two have had. If Bourne is ever going to become a top draw with WWE, he needs to find a way to make up for his size against the big men.

OUTLOOK: 2010 could be a banner year for Bourne, but only if he makes some adjustments in the ring against his bigger opponents. In reality, a U.S. or Unified tag title is a very reasonable goal for the St. Louis native, who would most likely not have to contend with men such as Sheamus, John Cena, or Randy Orton in chasing those titles.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Every time I see the guy in the ring, I am just amazed with some of the things he can pull off. Evan Bourne is just one of the most talented high-flyers WWE has ever had under contract. Where that will get him is anyone's guess, but if it were up to me, I'd have him at the top of the card."

—Jerry "The King" Lawler



Photo by Wayne McCarty

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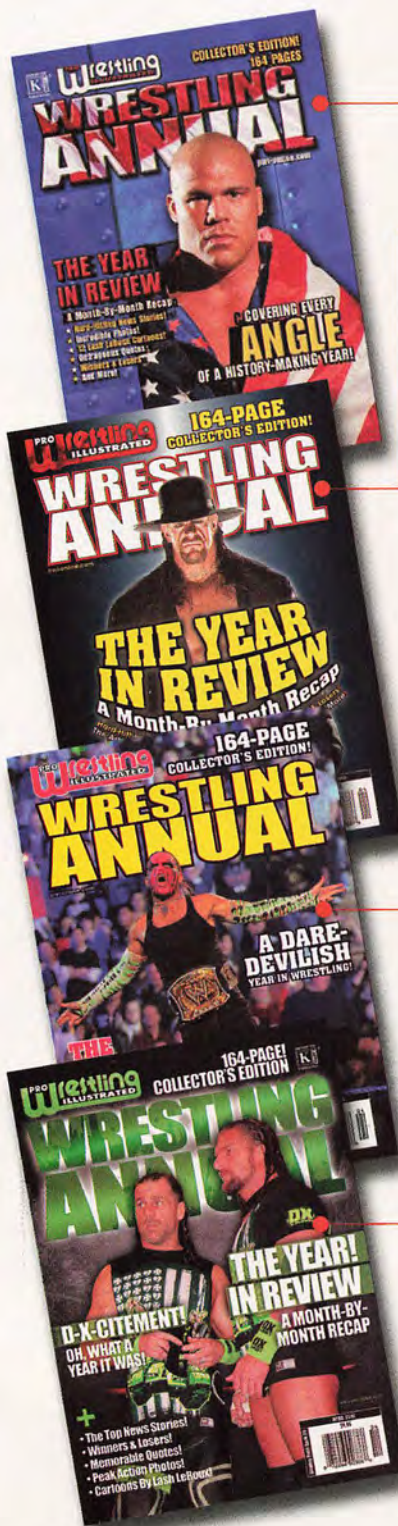
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submission ... **Angelina Love** beat Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** in a non-title bout.

Here's one for the annals. **Jimmy Valiant** has made history by becoming the only living wrestler to compete in six decades. Just as intriguing, Valiant teamed with former arch-rival **Ivan Koloff** for the very first time to pull off this feat at an event in Shawsville, Virginia. Valiant and Koloff were managed by **Col. Howard** and they defeated **Shawn Christian** and "Mean" **Donnie Green**, managed by **Bobby O'Neil**.

"Brother, our town of Shawsville is so small that we don't even have a stop light," Valiant told me. "We packed over 600 people into the gym that night."

It's safe to say this event might have been the most historic wrestling card in the history of Shawsville Middle School.



Photo by Jeff Cohen

Toni Adams passed away at the young age of 45. She will be remembered not only for her beauty, but for having the courage to stand up for her husband, Chris Adams, against Steve Austin and Adams' ex-wife, Jeannie Clark.

News from IWA Puerto Rico: **Noel Rodriguez** won the fifth annual Jose Miguel Perez Cup on June 26 in Bayamon, earning a shot at the IWA heavyweight champion at any future event ... The downside is that Rodriguez lost the Intercontinental title to **Gilbert**, thanks to Gilbert's use of a kendo stick, on the same show ... IWA official **Savio Vega** continues to have an active in-ring career ... **Barbie Boy** is starting to develop a cult following. No word on whether he plans to team with Ken Girl in the near future.

This 'n' that: X division champion Doug Williams and former British Invasion teammate **Brutus Magnus** signed long-term contracts with TNA ... **Marti Funk**, wife of former NWA World champion **Dory Funk Jr.**, has submitted a pilot show—*Interviews Unscripted*—to **Oprah Winfrey's** new network, called OWN. The program features interviews with wrestlers from the Funking Conservatory ... **Ed Ferrara**, **Vince Russo's** partner in crime, has already departed TNA Creative.

From the Tears of a Clown Dept.: In an incident that seems more sad than funny, **Roddy Piper** recently got into an obviously staged fight with a comedian at a Los Angeles comedy club. **The Amazing Racist** (yes, that is the comedian's name) supposedly went after a patron, and Piper summoned the comedian to the stage. The comedian slapped Piper, who ducked a punch and clamped on the sleeperhold. Piper then rammed the comedian's head into a piano and proceeded to yank at his hair. He finished off the episode by whipping The Amazing Racist with his belt.

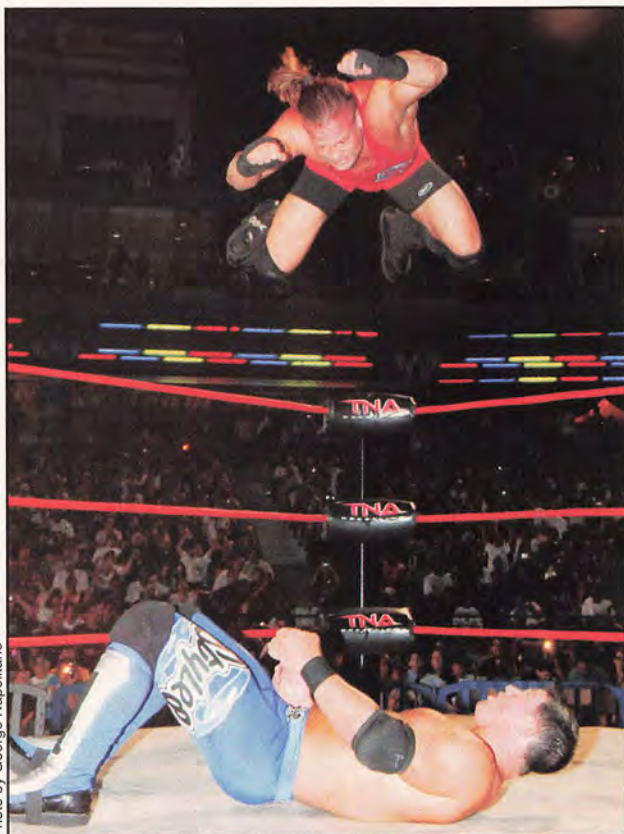
Ironically, The Amazing Racist probably grew up as a huge Piper fan, considering the "Rowdy Scot" painted half of his body black for a match against **Bad News Brown** at WrestleMania VI and once ordered **Rocky Johnson** to shine his shoes during an edition of "Piper's Pit." Then there's the time Piper offered **The Brisco Brothers** a bottle of Jack Daniel's, played "La Cucaracha" on his bagpipes, and called it the Mexican national anthem ... Yes, we could go on and on.

Before we part, I'd like to acknowledge the death of **Toni Adams**, the former wife of the late **Chris Adams**. When Chris' ex-wife, **Jeannie Clarke**, had the audacity to join **Steve Austin** in his feud against the British star, Toni came to her man's defense. She became known as one of the most beautiful women in all of wrestling in the early-1990s, and provocative shots of her in a bubble bath—which ran in *INSIDE WRESTLING* and its sister magazines—were all the rage.

In June, Toni was hospitalized with an infected abscess in her abdomen, a condition similar to what killed **David Von Erich** in 1984. She went into full cardiac arrest and was hospitalized again later in the month. She died on June 24 at age 45. She is survived by two children, son **Chris Adams Jr.** and daughter **Tori Gant**.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

Photo by George Napolitano



Rob Van Dam and AJ Styles put on another great match during a recent show in Brooklyn. TNA set records with their highest attended house show ever.

Jericho, of all people, should know the danger of having a bad gimmick!

WWE is still recovering from its Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view. The oddsmakers already know that any champion in a four-way match has only a 25 percent chance of retaining his or her title. That was definitely proven true at Fatal 4-Way, where **Sheamus** won his second WWE title in a match also involving **Randy Orton**, **Edge**, and defending champ **John Cena**; **Rey Mysterio Jr.** won his second WWE World championship over **C.M. Punk**, **The Big Show**, and defending champ **Jack Swagger**; **Alicia Fox** won the Divas belt against **Gail Kim**, **Maryse**, and defending champ **Eve Torres**.

Yet WWE's champions fared much better in the matches where they had as much as a 50 percent chance of winning. **The Miz** retained the U.S. belt against **R-Truth** and **Kofi Kingston** pinned **Drew McIntyre** to keep his Intercontinental title.

In non-championship matches at Fatal 4-Way, **David Hart Smith**, **Tyson Kidd**, and **Natalya** defeated **Jimmy** and **Jules Uso** with **Tamina**, and **Evan Bourne** scored the biggest win of his career, over Chris Jericho.

Speaking of upsets, TNA won over a tough Brooklyn crowd on July 2 at MCU Park to draw 6,000 fans paid, a company record here in the United States. **Rob Van Dam** successfully defended the TNA World title against former champ **AJ Styles** in a sensational encounter, pinning him after a frog splash. In

TIME FOR A POLICY CHANGE. Despite all the respect I have for Rick Steamboat, he has no business in the ring at 57 years of age. WWE has a despicable tendency to elevate its younger stars at the expense of its legends, which generally means the old-timers are left in a crumpled heap in the ring. We're not sure there is a direct correlation between the Nexus attack and Steamboat's hospitalization, but it's time to change this policy.

THE MARTHA DILEMMA. I understand why Martha Hart hates pro wrestling. She always resented the fact that wrestling kept her husband away from home and ultimately caused his death. But does she deserve complete control over how he is remembered? Owen Hart was a public figure and an important part of wrestling history. Does she want to rob him even of that?

FOUR-WAY FOOLISHNESS. Okay, this is the voice of old-school speaking. Aren't WWE's championships greatly diminished when they change hands like hot potatoes, in part because of a pay-per-view in which most of the title matches are determined in four-way bouts in which the odds are dramatically against the champion? Title wins and title reigns are becoming meaningless.

A VALIANT CAREER. Eighteen months ago, Jimmy Valiant, then 66, told me that he planned to wrestle one more match, in May 2010, so he could earn the claim of being the only living wrestler to have wrestled in six decades. I was incredulous that Valiant planned his career in that sort of detail. But I admire his sense of history. And I would suggest that Lou Thesz' record of being the only man to wrestle in seven decades is now in jeopardy.

TONI, TONI, TONI. As far as we know, Toni Adams didn't die because of a wild lifestyle. Hers is yet another premature death in an industry that has been full of them. My heart goes to her adult children, who lost their father, Chris, at age 46 in 2001, and now their mother, Toni, at age 45, in 2010. She remains lovely and vivacious on our magazine pages and in our memories.

other news coming out of the event, **The Amazing Red** beat **Brian Kendrick**, **Jay Lethal**, and **Homicide** to become the top contender to the X division title held by **Doug Williams**.

Also at the Brooklyn show, **Team 3-D** beat **Ink Inc.** (**Sannon Moore** and **Jesse Neal**) in a tables match ... **Jeff Hardy** defeated **Abyss** in a Monster's Ball match ... **Kurt Angle** forced **Desmond Wolfe** into

at a 1999 pay-per-view. Memories of that tragedy came to the fore on June 22 when Owen's widow, **Martha Hart**, held a press conference in Stamford, Connecticut, to announce her lawsuit claiming WWE used Owen's likeness without permission for its 2010 DVD release, *Hart & Soul: The Hart Family Anthology*. Martha characterized WWE's use of Owen's likeness as profiting from his death, which, in her words, was "morally, ethically, and legally wrong."

Bret Hart, who resumed his relationship with WWE this year after a 12-year separation from the company, blasted his sister-in-law via Facebook. "I believe Owen would turn in his grave watching Martha erase every single thing he ever did, all for spite," he wrote. "Martha Hart needs to celebrate Owen's memory as much as possible, not to block it away forever. How stupid and selfish is that?"

His tirade continued, "I personally believe Martha Hart has done nothing to keep his memory alive, and, sadly, he fades from view a little more every year. I do suspect this lawsuit is more about publicity, ego, and small-mindedness than it is about pro wrestling and all of those that are in it."

Overall, Bret's argument was pretty convincing—at least until he got to the final line: "I personally found great inner peace by opening up to forgiveness and

instead supported and encouraged current Hart family members now fulfilling their dreams in the complicated—but astounding—world known as the WWE Universe."

What? Did the WWE public relations department write that for him? Martha's argument is only strengthened when Bret—after a decade of bashing WWE—comes across as such a company man. All of this is even sadder when one recalls that Bret was one of Martha's few allies after her husband's death, and, as of now, Bret hasn't seen Owen's children in more than 10 years. Owen would hate all of this turmoil.

Martha's press conference in Stamford seemed designed to embarrass U.S. Senate candidate **Linda McMahon**. Martha denied that her lawsuit was politically motivated, but said Connecticut voters should question Linda's character. Meanwhile, Republican Party leaders have been put in the awkward position of dismissing WWE's steroid scandals—and related deaths—as "old news." RNC Chairman **Michael Steele** accused the Democrats of using Linda's WWE history against her only because "they have nothing else." Steele probably wishes he had nothing to do with McMahon, considering he called Afghanistan "a war of Obama's choosing" during the same Connecticut visit, prompting members of his own party to demand his resignation.

This fall, McMahon will be running against State Attorney General **Richard Blumenthal**, who is in trouble for making false claims, including service in the Vietnam War and membership on the Harvard swim team.

Have you watched **Chris Jericho's** new game show yet? Even in this era of wrestlers enjoying a sort of media omnipresence, it is a really big deal for someone in our industry to have landed a prime-time network program. And there's no doubt that Jericho's latest project, *Downfall*, is unique. Contestants compete in a trivia quiz for prizes and up to \$1-million cash. Sounds like a lot of fun unless you lose ... then you're pushed off the side of a 10-story building. Even Jericho is tethered to the platform on top of the building for his own safety to avoid a messy accident.

"It's scary when you get up there and stand on the edge," Jericho told the Associated Press. "That's the reason I'm the host. I don't ever have to go over the edge—unless the show gets canceled, in which case I'm the first one that gets thrown over."

The competition includes a giant conveyor belt that sends replicas of prizes, including cars, and contestants' personal mementos, over the building. "As a kid, you want to stand and drop eggs or G.I. Joes off the building to see if they fall apart," added Jericho. "That's the primal instinct that makes the show so interesting."

Downfall attracted 4.18 million viewers for its June 22 premiere, but dropped an alarming 26.3 percent by its second episode the following week. The overall consensus was that Jericho was charming as the host, but that *Downfall* relied on too many gimmicks.



Intercontinental champion Kofi Kingston left the Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view with the gold belt, primarily because he was able to control his own destiny against one opponent.

Photo by George Napolitano

CHRIS JERICO ON DOWNFALL
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By Harry Burkett

OVER THE FOURTH of July weekend, the hopes and prayers of the wrestling world were with **Rick Steamboat Sr.**, who was admitted to a Florida hospital on June 30 due to pain in his neck and shoulder. His symptoms were consistent with a brain aneurysm, and Steamboat was said to be suffering from bleeding in his brain. It was quite a scare for the entire family in the early going, but son **Richie Steamboat Jr.** quickly updated his father's condition via Twitter, stating, "Thanks, everyone, for the support and well wishes. God always helps those in need and he'll help my dad and our family stay strong and fight."

There was only so much Richie could say to alleviate everyone's concerns because his father was still in grave condition. Two days later, however, Steamboat's condition had stabilized, although he still faced a long rehabilitation period. The family was mum regarding the exact nature of Steamboat's ailments and whether he suffered any permanent or temporary brain damage.

On July 3, **Jim Ross** provided his own Twitter update, saying, "Ricky Steamboat improving a great

deal. In excellent spirits. Will likely be released from hospital at some point next week. All good news."

It seemed all too coincidental that Steamboat was struck less than two days after being brutally attacked by **Nexus** live on *Raw*. At first many fans thought Steamboat's hospitalization was part of a storyline, but WWE quickly nixed that notion by releasing a statement. Then there was the obvious question: Was Steamboat legitimately injured during the attack? And the entire episode has raised concerns regarding WWE's tendency to use its legends as beatdown fodder for rising stars.

WWE sources insist that the Monday night attack had nothing to do with Steamboat's current condition. Ironically, Steamboat was appearing on *Raw* to promote the release of *Ricky Steamboat: The Life Story Of The Dragon*, a three-DVD compilation of his life and career. It's just sad that what should have been a celebratory week had to turn tragic.

Wrestling performance can become all too real, and perhaps the grimmest case was the death of **Owen Hart**—falling out of a harness 90 feet above the ring—



Though the beatdown he received at the hands of the Nexus is said to have nothing to do with 57-year-old Rick Steamboat Sr.'s condition, it's hard to dismiss it as coincidence.

of the sport. I just hope she can get through the first few months without getting too freaked. If she can do that, the best woman wrestler in the world will be back in business!

BILL MENFORD
Los Angeles, CA

McINTYRE'S MISTAKE

Vince McMahon didn't do Drew McIntyre any favors by anointing him the future world champion. McIntyre now has the attitude that Vince has to prove himself right or look like a fool. The young man apparently thinks he can coast all the way to the top.

Well, he couldn't be more wrong!

McMahon made his proclamation to inspire the kid to greatness, and if the Chairman feels that McIntyre is making him look bad, he's going to find himself at the bottom of the heap, ill-prepared to work his way back.

Vince normally uses fear to inspire greatness. For reasons only he knows, he switched gears in McIntyre's case, and the results are evident. If McIntyre doesn't get his head on straight, he's going to have a big problem on his hands.

AL MORTMER
Pontiac, MI

NO LONGER EXTREME

I enjoyed the ECW invasion idea back in 1997 and again in 2001 when wrestlers from ECW "invaded" WWE. But enough is enough! Watching it take place in TNA is really just sad. Week after week, we see Raven and Tommy Dreamer, among others, walk into the Impact Zone and sit in the crowd and do nothing.

I'm sure both of these men are capable of having excellent matches, but let's face it: ECW has come and gone. It's over. TNA needs to move on to something else.

DEBBIE LINDNER
Mobile, AL

YOU'RE WELCOME!

Thank you, once again, for another fine year of WrestleMania coverage and analysis ("WrestleMania 26: The Real Winners and Losers" Volume 34, 2010.

As usual Dan Murphy's insights were right on the money, and the

photos were very cool.

Fans like me should appreciate the fine job your magazine does each year in breaking down what we can expect after 'Mania. I know I sure do.

ALLEN HILFRED
Charleston, SC □



Just because Melina rehabbed her torn ACL doesn't mean she'll be wrestling at 100 percent when she returns, says reader Bill Menford. She'll need to test her knees against tough women such as Michelle McCool in order to restore her confidence.

THIS IS GOOD?

So Randy Orton needs my cheers (Volume 34, 2010). Who the hell cares what he needs? If I'm going to invest emotionally in a wrestler, I want to know that he's willing to meet me half way.

This guy may indeed need us, but if he's too cool to admit it, who needs him? I say boo him until he taps. Let him at least smile in our direction, and then we'll see what we can do for him.

LOUISE BLANLEY
Evansville, IN

BLACK-HEARTED FANS

I don't get my fellow Ring of Honor fans. You cry for years that you want to see Tyler Black get a chance to wear the heavyweight belt, and then when he gets it, you give him crap!

What's it going to take for this guy to get some appreciation? Does he have to go to TNA or WWE? Come on, people, this guy's only 24. The things you scream at him are going to sting. How about we get behind him, the way we did Bryan Danielson?

SAMMY VERNOKA
Pelham, NY

HOW'S LuFISTO?

I was shocked when I read in "Names Makin' News" that LuFisto had suffered a stroke. She's only 30, after all. Any updates on her condition?

ANDREW MINOR
Batan Rouge, LA

[Editor's note: LuFisto is fine. She suffered a minor stroke in April and was back by June, beating Sara Del Rey in the opening round of a tournament to crown the first NWC Femmes Fatales champion.]

ERIC THE DREAD

Eric Young certainly pulled the wool over Bill Meltzer's

eyes in his "Hotseat" interview in your last issue (Volume 34). "I don't see a future with The Band. They're part of the past," he told your writer. Well, he was right about them being part of the past, but it's hard to believe that, at the time he made the statement, he had not already made up his mind to join them.

I wouldn't trust this guy again, and I hope your writer won't, either.

BURTON MELVIN
Bethesda, MD

MELINA'S TOUGHEST TEST

I understand that Melina is nearly through with her rehab program for her torn ACL. I'm a high school football player who suffered the same injury, and let me tell you, it was really scary for me to play after I got back. The doctors can tell you that the ligament is as strong as ever, but it really takes a while before you're convinced that what they are saying is true.

I know it's going to be tough for Melina, too. There are women who wouldn't think twice about going after her knee; that's just the nature of the sport. I just hope she



At 24 years old, ROH champion Tyler Black needs to hear cheers, not boos, from those who clamored for his title reign, reasons reader Sammy Vernoka.

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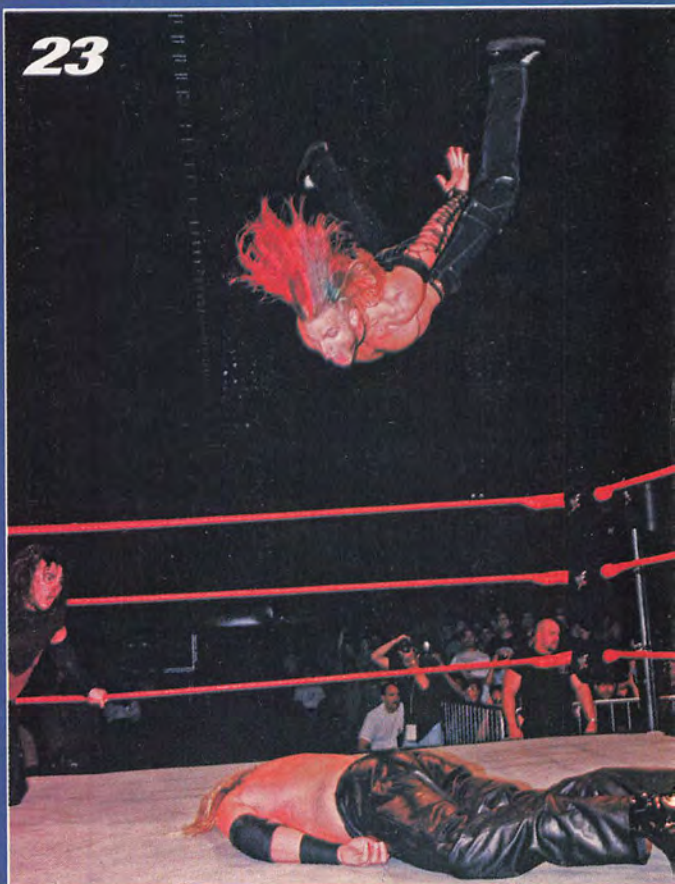
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Rob Van Dam by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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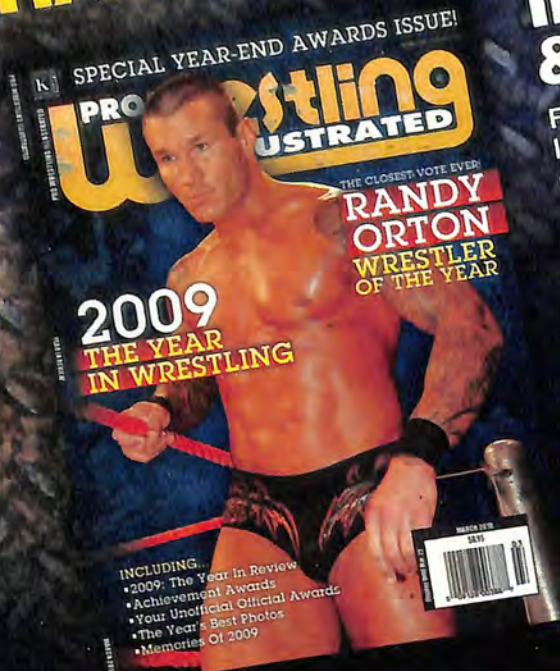
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